the weekly Standard

OCTOBER 4, 1999

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ANDREW FERGUSON

# Pro Wrestling and the End of History

BY PAUL A. CANTOR

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Malcolm Wallop
US Senate, Ret.

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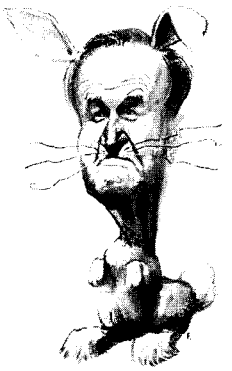
# Is Pat the Bunny Hopping Back to His Hutch?

After flirting with Ross Perot for his blessing and the Reform party nomination, will Pat Buchanan actually turn tail and run away from the race for the Reform party nomination before it even starts?

Listen to what he told Diane Rehm on her radio show Sept. 24. Buchanan had just complained about George W. Bush's fund-raising prowess, and Rehm asked him why he was thinking of leaving the GOP: "I believe the Republican nomination is virtually rigged now; it's what you might call a stacked deck," Pat complained. "But then you hear that the Republican hierarchy down there in Austin—Mr. Bush's folks—have been in touch with Governor Ventura in the Reform party, and [Ventura's] in touch with Donald Trump, who has more money than Mr. Bush. So if I'm running into another stacked deck, if our democracy has become a plutocracy, I can't play. So I've gotta look and see if I can win this."



Doesn't this sound as if Buchanan has already crafted his talking points for *not* going ahead and competing for the Reform party nomination? Buchanan may now be realizing that he has driven himself into a cul-de-sac. Pat-the-politician started to flirt with the Reform party—not necessarily a foolish idea for a presidential campaign that was going nowhere in the GOP. But at the same time, Pat-the-author was hitting the road to promote his much-labored-over revisionist history of World War II. His psychic investment in the latter enterprise seems to have taken precedence. That investment has manifested itself in the ever deeper hole he has been digging by resolutely defending his labor of love.

What Buchanan seems not to have anticipated is that the defense of his book might endanger his chances of getting the Reform party nomination, both because Ventura may decide he has to block Buchanan to save his party, and because Perot, eccentric though he may be, is not on record as being a World War II revisionist. Fearing failure in the Reform party, Buchanan seems to be thinking of reasons not to go through with his presidential run.

In the interests of full disclosure, THE SCRAPBOOK should note that Buchanan complimented this magazine to the *Today* show's Katie Couric last week, calling us "that little dinky magazine that pretends to be conservative. And these little boys have been on Pat Buchanan's case for a long time. The reason they're outraged, I'll tell you, is because they fear that Pat Buchanan may move to the Reform party and take the conservative movement with him." THE SCRAPBOOK, for its part, isn't outraged—particularly since this magazine urged Buchanan to move to the Reform party, confident he would be unable to take the conservative movement with him. Plus THE SCRAPBOOK has a certain fondness for others who refer to themselves in the third person. ♦

## Edmund Morris, Amiable Dunce

Scandal stalks the new authorized biography of Ronald Reagan. The author—Pulitzer Prize winner Edmund Morris—was granted unprecedented access to a sitting president and seems to have been so deeply burdened by this good fortune that he needed an extra decade to finish the book. And that's not all: Morris has invented a doppelgänger to help him tell the story, a fictitious "Edmund Morris" who is Reagan's contemporary (the real Morris was born in 1940) and reports as an eyewitness on the doings of the young future president. This novelistic device has justifiably provoked an initial storm of outrage, though it will be interesting to track the reactions of academics. On the one hand, there must be an unimaginable reservoir of pent-up professional envy that a talented non-academic like Morris got this plum assignment in the first place. On the other hand, it's a good bet that Morris will find defenders in the trendier university departments (not least for his symbolic desecration of Reagan).

Morris, in fact, telegraphed his technique in a striking 1991 op-ed for the *Washington Post*, "Truth in Substance," in which he explained why he and the historian David McCullough had filed a brief with the Supreme Court defending the journalist Janet Malcolm, who stood accused of concocting quotes. Not that Morris was entirely comfortable with the practice. "Scholarly biographers are not ordinarily supposed to be parties to such tinkering with the truth," he archly noted. "God knows, I lock my study door and drop all the blinds before deleting so much as a dot from a four-dot ellipsis in somebody's quoted remarks. Biographers and historians are generally more conscientious about accurate quotation than journalists are. Not only that, we have to document our sources, whereas reporters will go to jail rather than reveal theirs."

Needless to say, this was all throat



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clearing, deeply ironic in retrospect, as Morris worked himself up for one hell of a "however" clause: "What, ultimately, is Truth? . . . The ultimate test of any piece of nonfiction writing must be its success in saying something—or quoting something—that a majority of readers 'can't help but believe.'"

The moral of this story, THE SCRAPBOOK can't help but believe, is that when popular historians start asking in newspaper columns, What is Truth? (with a capital T) and find themselves unable to give a persuasive answer, the game is up. Perhaps Edmund Morris should have stayed locked in his study, pondering the ellipsis in his career. ♦

## Wing Nuts

NBC's White House drama *The West Wing*, created by self-proclaimed liberal Democrat and *enfant terrible* Aaron Sorkin, debuted last week. The central conflict of the first episode revolved around the Harold Ickes character (played by Brad Whitford), who belittles the faith of a religious pundit on a *Capital Gang*-like show. Various senior staff come to him concerned that the president will have him fired to placate religious conservatives. Of course, they all agree that he was right in principle, but as a political matter the religious nuts are useful to the president. The chief of staff explains, "We need these people."

So a group of religious leaders is invited to the White House for a conversation about family values. Barely 30 seconds into the meeting it turns out that the Christians are—surprise! —vicious, manipulative anti-Semites. The dialogue begins to break down when suddenly the president (Martin Sheen) strides into the room and takes control. With gumption spilling out of his ears, the POTUS tells off the bigots: His adolescent daughter just received a death threat in the mail from a Christian group, and if these people will be so kind as to get the hell out of his White House he'd be much obliged because he isn't about to talk with them about anything. Cue the inspirational music.

Unsurprisingly, the one thing the *New York Times* found to like was that the show "tackles the religious right with a vehemence rare in politics or entertainment." Yeah, it's a rare thing when Hollywood takes on the Christian right. What courage! What artistic novelty!

Conservative Christians, often mocked as paranoid, may soon make that old counterculture bumper sticker their own: Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not out to get you. ♦

## There's No Bureaucrat Like a U.N. Bureaucrat

September 21, 1999, "GENEVA (Reuters)—U.S. and Asian experts flew to Taiwan Tuesday to help rescue operations after a massive earthquake, while the United Nations awaited a go-ahead from China before launching its own coordinating mission. . . . The United Nations was held back by the fact it does not recognize Taiwan and needed China's approval. . . ." ♦



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# Casual

## Puff Daddy

Mike Kinsley, while editor of the *New Republic*, had a half-serious piece of advice for his writers. If you're doing a story about a politician or public official, don't interview him. You might like him, or her. Mike was onto something. Actually liking the person you're writing about—or holding forth about on TV—happens often enough that it's one of the dangers of Washington journalism. And there are other dangers I'll get to shortly.

First, the liking problem. Reporters pretend to be tough-minded and aloof, but of course they're not. Gathered in a pack they can be cruel and unfeeling, but not when they're on their own. They're softies, easily schmoozed, ever susceptible to being fooled by appearances. How do you think Bill Clinton got started? Reporters trekked to Little Rock, spent a few hours with him, and fell in love. I admit to succumbing occasionally (not to Clinton). There are some people I leave it to others in the news business to zing. Names? Sorry, that would be compromising.

But I'll cite a couple of people who've gotten along famously with the press largely because reporters like them. Mike McCurry is an example. Yes, he was a deft press secretary for Clinton. Working for a morally handicapped boss and sometimes passing along false information might have ruined his relations with the media. Didn't happen. McCurry was simply too well liked. And, sure, I like him.

At the moment, the likability award is shared by George W. Bush and John McCain, rivals for the Republican presidential nomination. Bush is fun to be around, gives everyone, including reporters, a nickname, and is something of a wise guy, which gets him in trouble from time to time but appeals to journalists. McCain is legendarily accessible to the media and spins reporters so cleverly that he seems candid and often actually is.

Another danger for Washington journalists is flattery. Maybe there's some group I've overlooked, but my sense is reporters in the national media are the most easily flattered people on the planet. They want to believe they're an important part of the great political game. They want to be seen as individuals, not merely as the latest in a series of faceless journalists to show up from NBC or the *Los Angeles Times*. Most of all, they want to be regarded as serious reporters, not repeaters—as interpreters of what politicians do, not just transcribers of their comments.

Darren Gygi

The most obvious form of flattery is for a public figure to let a reporter know he reads his stories or follows him on television. This has to be done subtly. Calling up and saying "Thanks for the puff piece" is too crude. That's happened to me more than once, and I instantly felt embarrassed and wished I hadn't written the piece. No, the smart way to flatter is to comment *en passant* about some marginal item buried in the reporter's story or about a throwaway line on a television chatfest. This works. Henry Kissinger, while in Washington, was famously good at it.

Another tack is to ask a reporter's advice. Done properly, which means privately, this can give a reporter a vested interest in a politician's success. But it's often done with blatant insincerity, and backfires. As a young reporter in the 1970s, I had dinner, along with a handful of other journalists, with the new head of the American Bar Association. I'm not a lawyer, and I'd only been covering the legal beat for about a month, yet he asked my advice. I said my advice was that he not seek my advice. He was taken aback. But if he'd waited a year, met privately with me, and asked the same question, who knows what would have happened?

The final danger is encountering a person you've hammered in print or on the air. Either the person is still fuming, which leads to a nasty argument, or he's willing to ignore the criticism and talk amiably, which makes for a hypocritical conversation. Such encounters occur all too often and have become a disincentive to pound a public figure in the first place. (This disincentive doesn't apply in the case of prominent conservatives like Newt Gingrich.) The thing to remember is that Washington is a small community. Reporters and officials gather daily inside a few square miles of downtown Washington, and efforts to avoid those you've pilloried are never fail-safe.

Once, on a year-end-awards show of *The McLaughlin Group*, panelists were asked to select a "traitor of the year." I chose Justice Anthony Kennedy of the Supreme Court, a conservative who'd voted to affirm *Roe* v. *Wade*. A few days later, I found myself at the same Christmas party as the justice. I didn't know whether he knew of the "award" or cared, and I didn't wish to find out. Fortunately it was a large party, and I managed to steer clear of Mr. Justice Kennedy for the entire evening.

**Fred Barnes**



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# Correspondence

## Vietnam Reconsidered

I concur with Fred Barnes's conclusion that the war in Vietnam was an honorable one, a view rarely voiced in the liberal media ("The Truth About Vietnam," Sept. 20). I do demur from his assertion that the United States failed to win the war, that "the victory was thrown away." In the first place, the terminology is defective. The "war" in Vietnam was really the battle of Vietnam, a battle in the larger, more significant war waged against the Soviet Union and its allies. The worst we can conclude is that the United States lost the battle of Vietnam, but won the war against the Soviet Union.

In fact, I would argue that the United States did not lose the battle of Vietnam. Our struggle in Indochina opened a 30-year window for our allies in southeast Asia, during which period they crushed local Communist insurgencies, developed world class economies, and became major players on the Western side in world affairs. Thus the battle of Vietnam was a successful holding action. Further, our withdrawal from Vietnam (the emblem of our "defeat") was probably quite beneficial for us. Had South Vietnam repulsed the Communist invasion, we might have found ourselves with a long-range deployment in the face of a continuing low-level guerrilla war, with its attendant human and material cost.

The foregoing doesn't mean that I reject the revisionist analyses provided by the Sorley and Lind books; on the contrary, I largely agree with them. But there is another issue here, namely, the vexation felt by anti-Communists who resort to various contortions to deal with the leftist assertion that the United States lost the war in Vietnam. Why not reject this assertion altogether? This would be historically more accurate, and would transfer the vexation to the left side of the political spectrum.

Dennis Travis
*Glen Head, NY*

When I returned home in 1969 after serving in combat with the 1st Cavalry Division, Airmobile, in Vietnam, I was staggered by the madness that had overtaken my beloved country. The national goal seemed to be to make heroes of cowards and cowards of heroes. I knew we were winning and that our cause was just. I knew that the men I proudly served with were as good and courageous as any this nation had ever called to arms. I swallowed hard and waited for our inevitable victory and the vindication of our sacrifices, along with the day of reckoning for those who gave aid and comfort, in a thousand different ways, to the Communist dictators of North Vietnam, China, and Russia.

Sad to say, I'm still waiting. Books such as Sorley's *A Better War* and Lind's *Vietnam: The Necessary War* are comforting, but these authors will never be interviewed by Katie Couric or any other network host and, with the exception of your review and perhaps a blurb in *National Review* or the *Washington Times*, will pass on unaddressed.

The truth, as is so often the case, is just not that complicated. Two and a half million Americans fought in Vietnam. Two hundred and fifty million stayed home. Within the ranks of those who didn't serve are the politicians, press, professors, and protesters who took to the streets to demand that we be defeated and the North Vietnamese be allowed to impose a barbaric Communist dictatorship on the people of the South. If the sons, brothers, and fathers who "answered the call" are ever revealed as the courageous patriots that they were, and are, then what is to be said of the others? The job, as the "Four P's" see it, is an ongoing trashing of the fighting men of Vietnam and their cause; to make villains of heroes and heroes of villains. They don't dare let up, for fear of having to answer for their cowardly, treacherous, and, in some cases, treasonous actions. To paraphrase the 1960s film *Love Story*: Being on the Left "means never having to say you're sorry."

Bill Corsair McGroarty
*New York, NY*

In his review of recent books on the Vietnam war, Fred Barnes writes the thirty-seventh president out of the story. General Abrams would not have been able to perform his tactical magic without the breathing room bought by President Nixon's war decisions—the Cambodian incursion in 1970 and the bombing of Hanoi in May and December 1972, not to mention his decision to stay in Vietnam to begin with. These steps were among the most difficult ever taken by any postwar president. Congressional outrage over the December bombings fanned the fires of Watergate, which in turn deprived the president of the ability to enforce the Paris Peace Accords. Yet Barnes discusses the Nixon administration's war policy only tangentially; Nixon himself gets one incidental mention in the whole piece. Yes, Vietnam revisionism is inevitable. But when it comes, both the left and right may have to gird for revisionism regarding the third and most successful Vietnam commander in chief as well.

John H. Taylor
*Richard Nixon Library*
*Yorba Linda, CA*

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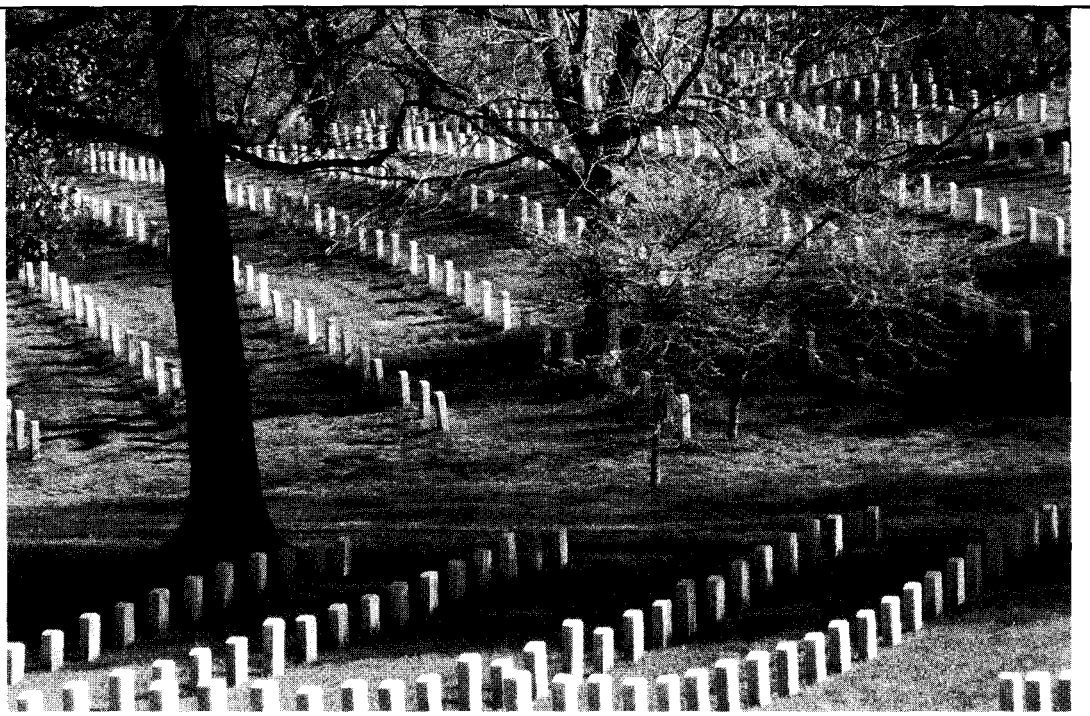

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# Hawaii's Nuremberg Laws

America is an enormous country speckled with all manner of random foolishness. It is also a nation of laws, earnestly accumulated and amended since before the Revolution. And sometimes it is both things at once, spawning an entire sub-genre of newspaper humor devoted to "weird state statutes." Thus, our attention might momentarily be drawn to, say, Louisiana, where a ban purportedly attaches to gargling in public. Or Michigan, where lawyer's legend has it that a husband enjoys enforceable rights to the hair on his wife's head. Or Vermont, where they say the code books make it *verboten* for anyone to whistle while underwater.

We laugh at ourselves when we read about stuff like this. How typically American, we think—such a quenchless passion for oddball rule-making; so much charming local variety in the result.

And then there is Hawaii.

It is formally a state like any other, of course, and Hawaii, too, has weird statutes. But it turns out Hawaii's is a weirdness beyond compare, and not at all typically American—not yet, anyway—in two significant respects. First, Hawaii's most outlandish laws are neither semi-apocryphal nor obscure, but are instead real and central to that state's daily life and politics. And second, these particular laws are not the slightest bit charming. They are altogether disgusting. Almost unbelievable.

*Hawaii's official "ancestry enrollment form" asks citizens the "percentage of Hawaiian blood" coursing through their veins.*

For example. In Hawaii, an agency of the state government asks American citizens to submit *pili la 'oa iho*—that is, "personal information"—on an official "ancestry enrollment form." The personal information at issue here is the "percentage of Hawaiian blood" coursing through these citizens' veins. And the veins of each applicant's "present spouse." And the veins of his children. And the veins of his *makuahine* and *makua kane*, or "biological" mother and father. In order to "prove 50 percent or more Hawaiian blood," the purity level Hawaii prefers, the state announces that you "must" include with this form copies of multi-generational birth certificates and "other documentation, back to your full Hawaiian ancestor(s)."

Once in receipt of this form, the state, if it is satisfied that you have substantiated at least a minimal Hawaiian "blood quantum," will mail you an individually numbered "identification document" according you the status of "registered Hawaiian."

Just for starters, cardholders are entitled to state-negotiated "group discounts on selected retail and service purchases" around the state. And that is the least of the blessings granted to sufficiently "Hawaiian" Hawaiians. Since 1978, the Office of Hawaiian Affairs (OHA), the agency that issues this race passport, has distributed hundreds of millions of dollars—drawn from *general* tax revenues and profits from land held in *general* public trust—exclusively to genetically determined ethnic "Hawaiians," defined in law as "any descendant of the aboriginal peoples inhabiting the Hawaiian Islands . . . in 1778," the year the first white man arrived. Moreover, not incidentally, Hawaii's state constitution grants the favored race exclusive control of OHA's nine-member board, all of whom "shall be Hawaiian" and "shall be . . . elected" in regularly scheduled ballots open only to other Hawaiians.

That last part bears emphasis. Hawaii's statute books make crystal clear that "no person shall be eligible to register as a voter" in statewide elections for the OHA board "unless the person . . . is Hawaiian." Hawaiian not because he is a citizen of Hawaii; Hawaiian by blood.

We know what you're wondering at this point: Can they actually *do* all this? Can American shopkeepers—by prompting of the state, no less—sell the same goods at different prices according to their customers' ethnicity? Can a state law reserve public employment—in offices exercising wide-ranging executive responsibility—to citizens of a particular race? Can it authorize such employees to disburse general public funds exclusively for their own race's bene-



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fit? And can it *ever*—in any statewide election, anywhere, any time—explicitly withhold the franchise from people with the wrong "blood quantum"? You would not think so. You would think that such a nakedly racialist, Nuremberg-style legal regime—*ethnic identity cards, for heaven's sake*—runs flatly afoul of the United States Constitution.

So you would be surprised to learn that it has taken a full 21 years for even a single aspect of Hawaii's "Hawaiian" laws—their racial voter-eligibility requirement—to approach dispositive resolution in the federal courts. The constitutionality of that rigid ballot restriction is scheduled for oral argument before the Supreme Court next Wednesday in a case called *Rice* v. *Cayetano*. At long last exposed to national view, the state of Hawaii will nevertheless, without apparent embarrassment, attempt to persuade the justices that its breathtakingly ugly law should be upheld.

Hawaii will not have an easy time of it. By undisputed Supreme Court precedent, the Fourteenth Amendment's equal protection clause permits state governments to classify their citizens by race only when the classification serves a compelling interest in the remediation of discrimination. Hawaii has never previously claimed to be pursuing such an interest on behalf of the ethnic group in question, and it will not be permitted suddenly to invent that justification, ex post facto, next Wednesday. Instead, the state will be forced to contend that it has made no racial classification in the first place, that when it grants sole voting rights in OHA elections to "aboriginal peoples," it is doing only that: favoring "peoples," not races.

*The Democratic party has long viewed the Constitution's colorblind ideal as mere words on paper to be evaded for political convenience. This is not right.*

The rhetorical sleight of hand here is perfectly transparent; Hawaii's legislature years ago candidly acknowledged that "'peoples' does mean 'races.'" But the subterfuge is necessary to sustain the state's basic fallback position: the novel suggestion that ethnic Hawaiians are legally analogous not to blacks or whites or Asians or Hispanics or any other race per se, but to the "members" of an "Indian tribe." Specific textual provisions of the Constitution give Congress unusual plenary power—subject only to the loosest Fourteenth Amendment review by the courts—to legislate with respect to such tribes. Therefore, Hawaii pretends to reason, any *state*-level legislature must be granted similar latitude to make laws concerning every conceivable "indigenous population" within its jurisdiction.

This argument, too, is preposterous. At an earlier stage of the *Rice* litigation, Hawaii meekly conceded that "[t]he tribal concept simply has no place in the context of Hawaiian history." Congress has never recognized ethnic Hawaiians as an Indian Tribe. If it ever did so recognize them, Congress's relevant constitutional authority would not be automatically transferred to the *state* legislature of Hawaii. Nor could Congress ever deliberately transfer to Hawaii the power to conduct an ethnic-only statewide election, in any case. No such power exists under the Constitution. Forget the Fourteenth Amendment. The Fifteenth Amendment is absolute: "The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any State on account of race."

Oh, Hawaii here responds, that's not what we're doing at all. We deny 85 percent of our otherwise registered voters access to the OHA election ballot not "on account of race," but simply on account of the fact that they are not "aboriginal peoples." At which point the state's defense begins to circle back on itself—and collapses in a ridiculous hash of mutilated fact and law.

We can confidently predict that the current Supreme Court will conclude *Rice* v. *Cayetano* by invalidating Hawaii's racist voting law. That is the good news.

And here is the bad. We cannot confidently predict how the Supreme Court might later decide the constitutionality of Hawaii's other racist "Hawaiian" laws—its ethnic registry, for example—none of which is yet under challenge in any federal court.

The prognosis remains murky like this for the simple reason that the Court's incumbent majority cannot live forever and may well be replaced in the next presidential administration. So the future of race-conscious law will depend to a large extent on who gets elected in the year 2000.

If the new president is a Democrat, he will appoint judges who share his party's views on race and law, and we already know what those views are. We need look no further than the behavior of the president we've had these past seven years. We need look no further, in fact, than the Clinton administration's behavior in *Rice* v. *Cayetano* itself. Joining Hawaii in defense of a racist voting law next Wednesday will be the "United States," represented, as always, by the Justice Department.

The Justice Department's position next week is a disappointment but not a surprise. The Democratic party has long viewed the Constitution's colorblind ideal not as a command but merely as a bunch of words on paper to be talked around and thus evaded for momentary political convenience. This is not right. The Constitution is not just some "weird statute." Our next president, who will sweepingly influence the courts through his judicial appointment power, should know the difference.

*—David Tell, for the Editors*



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# Bill Gates, Minority Leader

## A billion dollars is a terrible thing to waste. BY CHRISTOPHER CALDWELL

ALL THE BLACKS who got Ph.D.s in physics last year and all the American Indians who got Ph.D.s in math could ride comfortably on one tandem bicycle. Blacks make up 13 percent of the population, but only 1 percent of engineers and 7.2 percent of computer techies. Lump them together with American Indians and Hispanics, and you still don't reach 2 percent of hard-science doctorates. The richest man in the world worries that these figures bespeak a "digital divide" or a "computer gap" between the races. So in mid-September, Bill Gates earmarked a portion of his $100 billion Microsoft fortune to minority education. Starting in the fall of 2000, the Gates Millennium Scholars program will send 1,000 minority students to college in whatever discipline they choose and then continue to fund them through grad school, provided they pursue computer technology, engineering, math, science, education, or library science. The gift is open-ended and will cost at least a billion dollars over twenty years. It is hard to decide whether to applaud Gates's largesse or deplore his racialism.

Gates insists there was "no politics" involved in his decision. If so, one wonders what Gates thinks politics *is*, because the scholarships were announced against the backdrop of threats to affirmative action programs. California and Washington (where Microsoft is headquartered) have banned racial preferences through initiatives at the state level, Michigan and Florida are likely to do so at upcoming referenda, and Texas's race-based college admission policies have been overturned in the courts.

At the University of Washington, Seattle, an end to quotas is expected to leave the institution with 40 percent fewer blacks, 30 percent fewer Hispanics, and 20 percent fewer Indians. Microsoft took a stand against Washington's anti-preference Initiative 200. Gates's father, an old-line Seattle civic leader, has consulted with UW about how to get around the rules and keep minority enrollment high. Says Washington's liberal governor Gary Locke, who was present at the scholarship announcement: "The advocates of Initiative 200 said government can't do it; they never said that the private sector can't do it." It is clearly Gates's hope to do with private funding what it is rapidly becoming illegal to do with public.

The Gates scholarships are open to blacks, Hispanics, Indians, and Asians (for whom underrepresentation in higher education is hardly a problem), but not to whites. The United Negro College Fund—whose president, the ex-congressman Bill Gray, is a friend of Gates—will take a lead role, with the National Hispanic Scholarship Fund and the American Indian College Fund acting as junior partners. The exact interplay of these groups is to be determined by a minority advisory board that begins meeting in October. But conversa-

*Christopher Caldwell is senior writer at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.


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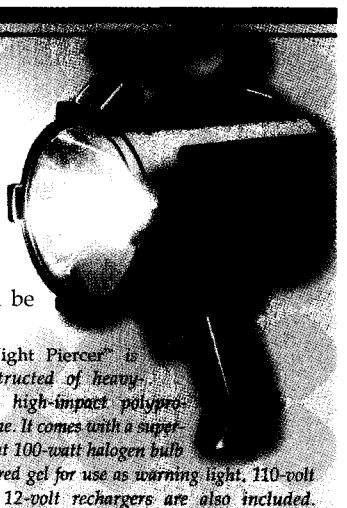

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tions with officials at all three groups indicate that they will act as bureaucratic Bantustans, with each minority group picking an allotted number of Millennium Scholars from its own "race." No one yet knows how to handle "Asians," since no foundation exists to agitate for scholarships for them.

The most illogical aspect of the grant is that *education* is listed as one of the graduate disciplines eligible for funding. Bill Clinton, in his very brief statement on Gates's gift, addressed "the need to encourage young people to become teachers." But clearly, no such encouragement is needed; 80 percent of doctorates awarded to blacks are in education. One suspects either that powerful education lobbies have had a hand in shaping this program (Gray was a member of the board of the Gates Learning Foundation until it was merged into a larger Gates endowment); or that the scholarship's designers have doubts that minority communities are capable of absorbing a billion dollars in hard-science scholarship money.

That renders dubious the grantmakers' assumption that funding is the primary—even the *only*—obstacle to higher minority representation in high-tech. There is no evidence beyond the anecdotal to back up this proposition. And to the extent that the gift merely replaces other sources of financing, much of this money will be going to top-notch students who would have been paid for at Ivy League-caliber universities in any case. As such, the gift would ultimately go not to needy kids but to Harvard, Stanford, Yale, MIT, and the other elite universities that are the bulwark of America's rapidly hardening class system.

And yet, Bill Gray hopes for a "20 percent add-on to where our normal growth would take us." This means something different. It means a privately funded expansion of colleges' already huge commitment to minority enrollments. Administered *that* way, the Gates program is an affirmative-action program pure and simple, a billion-dollar subsidy for the race-based swapping of prospective (white) science candidates for (non-white) students a couple hundred SAT points lower. And the scholarships' potential to erode academic standards does not stop there. The program's insistence that Millennium Scholars maintain at least a 3.0 grade point average to retain eligibility is superficially attractive. But it is hard to see how this could fail to result in near-irresistible pressure on teachers to race-norm their grades.

Fred Harper

**Bill Gates**

Can we call Gates's gift a generous one? No one can deny that Gates has long held a serious interest in minority issues. (Even if it has been at times bizarre: As a Harvard undergrad, he *requested* minority roommates from the university housing office.) Nor should one gainsay that Gates is throwing a lot of money around. But a billion dollars may be very little to pay for the opportunity to deflect skepticism from the high-tech industry's own anemic rates of minority (except for Asian) hiring. Gates, whatever his intentions, is shunting responsibility for black and Hispanic non-participation in the high-tech economy away from (his own) business sector and onto (someone else's) education sector.

Now for the gift itself. The "generosity" consisted in making the original investment in the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, which a booming stock market has fattened to $17 billion. The actual *payouts* are now compulsory. Under the terms of the 1969 Tax Reform Act, set up to keep rich people from parking funds in tax-free charities, all foundations must spend at least 5 percent of their assets annually. If Gates doesn't pay out at least $850 million, it gets seized from him. So get used to these grants: Gates is required by law to give roughly a billion dollars away *to something* every year.

Gates is clearly entering a phase of his life in which he seeks to drive public policy from a position of personal privilege. "It's fine for people to talk about what public policy should be, but this is private philanthropy," he says. The question is whether he should do this by means of racially exclusive policies that Americans are repudiating by overwhelming plebiscitary majorities.

The representatives of the various college funds were wholly untroubled by the scholarship's racial basis, but only Suzette Brewer, spokesperson for the American Indian College Fund, was willing to say so for the record. Asked if she thought the criticism of the scholarships' exclusion of whites was justified, she replied, "To be measured in my response, I would have to say, generally and historically speaking, no. To be perfectly honest. Historically, they run the system."

This seemed to be an almost universal misperception among the various racial representatives. Amidst the cavalcade of malarkey that followed the September announcement, Bill Gray's allegation that whites controlled vast tranches of scholarship money stood out as particularly delusional: "There are scholarships by the Daughters of Norway, Sons of the Confederacy," Gray said, "and I don't think that an Asian American could claim that his great-grandfather was



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from Norway or fought for the Confederacy and get one of those. So by definition, who are those scholarships for?"

What world is Gray living in? Not that scholarships weren't *set up* that way at one time, but if anyone today tried to *administer* them that way, he'd be thrown in jail faster than you can say Bob Jones.

In fact, Gates dropped a hint last week that he might get around to subsidizing whites too. When asked about the exclusion of whites from the Millennium Scholars, he replied, "We'll be supporting other scholarship programs as well." It sounds like we're on our way to having two funds—one for minorities and one for whites. The *New York Times* may be right to say that Gates is "adhering to the finest traditions of philanthropy." One of these, unfortunately, is the tradition that used to be called "separate but equal." ♦

# Kofi Annan's U.N. Power Grab

## U.S. foreign policy doesn't require the permission of the Security Council. BY JOHN R. BOLTON

DEBATE OPENED LAST WEEK in the Fifty-fourth United Nations General Assembly, highlighted in the media by President Clinton's annual address. But Secretary General Kofi Annan had made the real news even before the session started, by publicly proclaiming that only the U.N. Security Council can legitimately authorize the use of force in international affairs. Indeed, the most noteworthy aspect of the president's otherwise pedestrian speech was his implicit endorsement of the Annan doctrine.

Annan first publicly broached this new doctrine during the air campaign over Yugoslavia. Not only had that campaign not been authorized by the Security Council, if the United States and its European partners sought a

*John R. Bolton is senior vice president of the American Enterprise Institute. He served as assistant secretary of state for international organization affairs in the Bush administration.*


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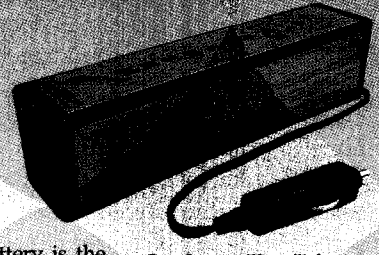

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U.N. resolution to intervene, it would almost certainly have been vetoed by Russia and China. Furthermore, if the Security Council were considered the sole arbiter of just intervention, any use of force that lacked its imprimatur would be illegitimate. Aware of likely opposition, NATO acted on its own authority in Yugoslavia.

On a visit to the war zone, Annan said at the time: "Unless the Security Council is restored to its preeminent position as the sole source of legitimacy on the use of force, we are on a dangerous path to anarchy." Subsequently, in the secretary general's annual report to the U.N. membership, Annan returned to this theme, arguing that "enforcement actions without Security Council authorization threaten the very core of the international security system. . . . Only the [U.N.] Charter provides a universally legal basis for the use of force." These are sweeping—indeed breathtaking—assertions, made all the bolder by the fact that the U.N. Charter describes the secretary general as merely a "chief administrative officer."

But not only is the Annan doctrine limitless in its purported reach, it greatly inhibits America's ability (and everyone else's, for that matter) to use force to protect and advance its vital national interests. Such a limitation was never seriously advanced, and certainly not accepted, when the Senate considered the U.N. Charter in 1945. Indeed, during the Cold War, Americans would have greeted such statements by a U.N. secretary general with derision. Why did President Clinton allow Annan's assertions to go unrebuked and even support them, albeit implicitly, during his address to the General Assembly?

The Annan doctrine is clearly the result of post-Cold War wishful thinking. The absence of a visible threat, previously supplied by the Soviet Union, has led dreamers in the international strata to believe that force is no longer a serious option for responsible nations, except to swat the occasional dictator and prevent human rights abuses. The somewhat less dreamy do not ask such naive questions, but nonetheless see in the Annan doctrine an opportunity to dramatically limit the military autonomy of nation-states, particularly the United States.

The restraint of choice among these international actors is the Security Council, but they are happy also to use new institutions and treaties such as the International Criminal Court and the International Land Mine Convention. The implicit premise of the Annan doctrine—that

Ismael Roldan

**Kofi Annan**

force is unimportant while "international law" is practically everything—is widely held in Europe, but is also popular here, particularly in the Clinton administration. Although more an enthusiasm than a doctrine, this view is becoming very important as a force driving policy.

Wishful thinking about the United Nations, as mentioned, ran into a wall of reality in Kosovo. But instead of leaving the dreamers to their dreams, Clinton has felt compelled to justify the NATO intervention. In his speech before the General Assembly last week, he effectively submitted the Yugoslav campaign to the judgment of the Security Council, seeking its post facto blessing. Thus, he argued that NATO acted legitimately in Kosovo *because* it acted in the interest of the Security Council.

First, Clinton pointed out, the Security Council had condemned the Serbian atrocities, one of the stated reasons for the NATO campaign; hence the cause was just. Second, though NATO acted without Council authority, "we helped to vindicate the principles and purposes of the U.N. Charter"; hence the motives were pure. Third, NATO's action gave "the U.N. the opportunity it now has to play the central role in shaping Kosovo's future"; hence the result was right. While the president's willingness to argue that the end justifies the means should not surprise any careful student of his administration, what is surprising in his speech is that he showed any deference to the Security Council's supposed authority over NATO action.

The correct American response, for those who supported the NATO campaign, is: "We did not need the Security Council's permission to act. Besides, the Security Council was paralyzed and therefore useless for our purposes." In the Persian Gulf crisis, had President Bush not obtained Council authorization to use force against Iraq, he would have made precisely this case to support the U.S.-led coalition's subsequent assault. President Clinton's failure to make this case is neither accidental nor simply cordial, a case of being polite to the secretary general in the chamber of the General Assembly. He effectively accepted the Annan doctrine's logic.

With a lame-duck administration, we need not dwell on what the president's speech will mean in practice. Instead, with a national election a little more than a year away, we should insist that candidates in both parties address Annan's challenge. This is not just a theoretical debate. In the long run, it is far more important than the issue of American arrears to the United Nations, which the media never tire of. If the Annan doctrine is left unanswered, we will soon hear about "emerging new international norms" that will make it harder and harder for the United States to act independently in its own legitimate national interest. And we will wait in vain for our adversaries to follow those "norms." ♦



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# The Gentlemanly McCain Campaign

## To win the nomination, won't John McCain need to go after Bush? BY TUCKER CARLSON

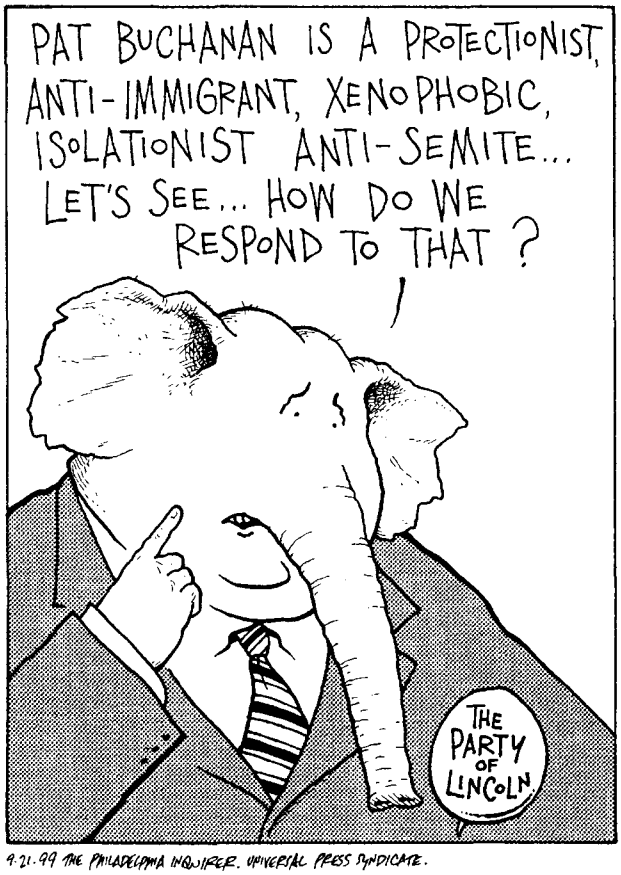
FOR AN ORGANIZATION with a reputation for exclusivity and intolerance, the Republican party is surprisingly reluctant to kick anyone out. Earlier this month, after years of embarrassing fellow Republicans with his sniping at Jews, Pat Buchanan released a book suggesting the United States should have been more reluctant to go to war with Nazi Germany. At first, there was virtually no reaction. Then Buchanan let it be known he was thinking of jumping to the Reform party.

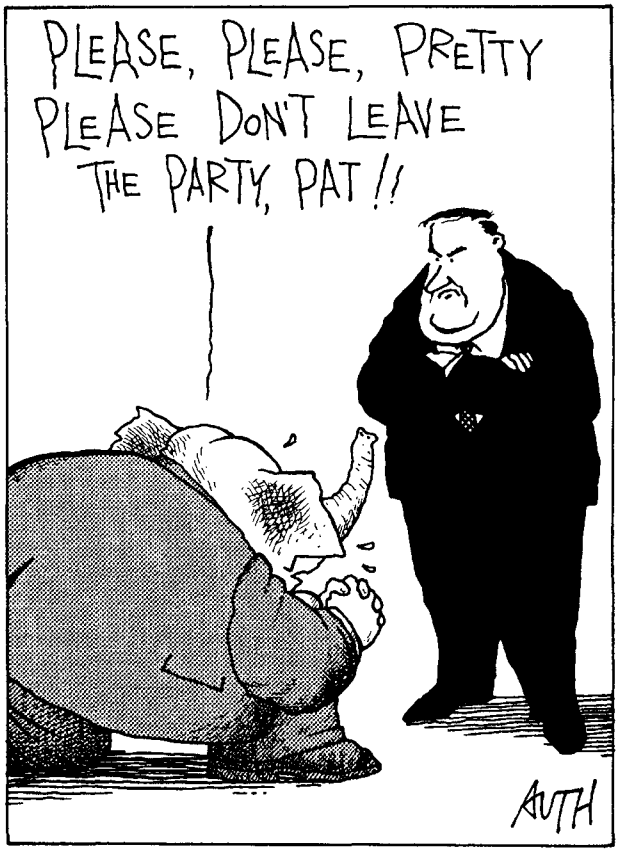
*Tucker Carlson is a staff writer for* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.

You would have expected cheers. You'd think Republicans would be relieved to finally cough up the Buchanan hairball. Instead, many seemed reluctant to let him go. Dan Quayle released a statement casting Buchanan's defection as a moral defeat for the GOP. George W. Bush, a man who claims Winston Churchill as a hero, refused to criticize Buchanan's views about the Second World War and last Friday called on Buchanan to stay in the party. By the end of last week, there was only one Republican presidential candidate willing to bid Buchanan good riddance: John McCain.

Buchanan reacted violently to McCain's criticism, denouncing the senator from Arizona as a liar, and implying that McCain—a former prisoner of war who refused early release from captivity in North Vietnam—lacked the courage to appear with him on the *Today* show. Editorial writers loved it. McCain was lauded, correctly, by his many friends in the press as a gutsy truth-teller, and otherwise treated to terrific news coverage.

Then he fell silent. McCain issued no more statements attacking Buchanan, and turned down opportunities to debate him on the war. The candidate who once did eight television interviews in a single day during the Kosovo crisis refused every offer to appear on a Sunday show to talk about Buchanan. Why? For McCain, continuing to disavow Pat Buchanan would have amounted to political tee-

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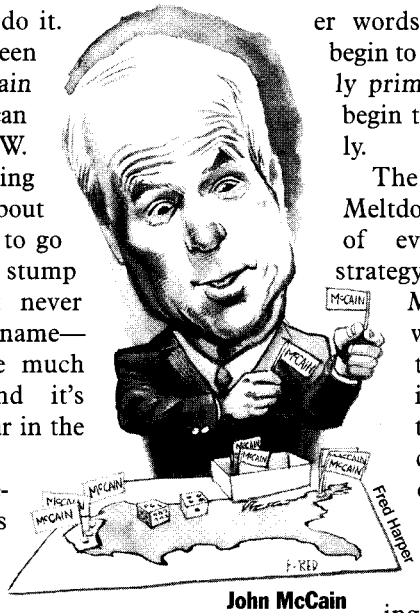
ball—easy, and fun, and fundamentally very safe. It would have kept McCain, still struggling to get above 5 percent in the polls, squarely in the news. Every swipe at Buchanan would have provided him a mini-Sister-Souljah moment, establishing McCain's bona fides as a sober man of principle in contrast to Buchanan the crackpot. Buchanan, meanwhile, would have gotten more of what he deserves.

McCain wouldn't do it. And he has so far been loath to attack his main rival for the Republican nomination, George W. Bush. There's something almost gentlemanly about McCain's reluctance to go bare-knuckled—in stump speeches he almost never criticizes anyone by name—but it doesn't make much political sense. And it's unlikely to get him far in the presidential race.



**John McCain**

The McCain strategy for victory is straightforward and well known: beat or finish close to Bush in New Hampshire, win South Carolina with the help of the state's large veterans' vote, and head into the New York and California primaries in early March riding the crest of an imminent upset. "At that stage you're on the wave," says Marshall Wittmann, an informal adviser to McCain. "You're on the covers of *Time* and *Newsweek*. You're on with Katie. The whole dynamic has changed."

At that point, the idea is, McCain will have captured the undivided attention of the media, which will in turn introduce him—heroic biography and all—to every Republican primary voter in America. Once McCain is well known, it will become obvious to voters that he is more qualified than George W. Bush to be commander in chief. Support for Bush will evaporate. McCain will win.

There are two problems with this scenario. First, it's probably not possible for the media to like or promote McCain more than they already do. (Thanks largely to rave reviews in newspapers and magazines, McCain's latest book has already sold close to 250,000 copies.) Second and more significant, Bush's support may be shallow, but it's very, very broad. His lead is so big, his fund-raising advantage so profound, Bush is likely to win the nomination on inertia alone, with or without New Hampshire and South Carolina. It's not enough, in other words, for McCain to begin to succeed in the early primaries. Bush must begin to fail. Dramatically.

The coming Bush Meltdown is at the heart of every challenger's strategy, though the McCain people are weirdly unwilling to admit it. "Bush is almost irrelevant to the McCain campaign," says one strategist with no hint of sarcasm. "It's much more about selling McCain than about tearing down Bush." Partly because of this attitude, there has been speculation that McCain is angling for a spot on the Bush ticket. "Absolutely not," replies McCain spokesman Howard Opinsky, and he's probably right. On the stump, McCain snorts when asked if he would consider becoming Bush's running mate, and goes on to make the job sound like something only a moron would accept. (A vice president, McCain says, has only two duties: to check daily on the health of the president, and to go to the funerals of Third World dictators.)

How to explain McCain's potentially fatal lack of nastiness? Some McCain advisers suggest that their candidate is just lying low for now, waiting until "people are listening" to unsheathe his hard edge. Perhaps. Or it may be that McCain simply wishes to remain a gentleman. In which case he'll probably remain a senator. ♦



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# Pro Wrestling and The End of History

*The traditional heroes and villains of the ring have disappeared—replaced by hulks who construct postmodern identities.*

**By Paul A. Cantor**

When the great Parisian Hegelian Alexandre Kojève searched for an image of the end of history, he finally hit upon the Japanese tea ceremony. Coming from Brooklyn, I am a bit less sophisticated and turn to American professional wrestling instead. For wrestling has been as much a victim of the end of the Cold War as the military-industrial complex. It is not just that the demise of the Soviet Union deprived wrestling of one set of particularly despicable villains. The end of the Cold War signaled the end of an era of nationalism that had dominated the American psyche for most of this century. Like much else in the United States, including the power and prestige of the federal government itself, wrestling had fed off this nationalism. It drew upon ethnic hostilities to fuel the frenzy of its crowds and give a larger meaning to the confrontations it staged.

The state of professional wrestling today thus provides clues as to what living at the end of history means. It suggests how a large segment of American society is trying to cope with the emotional letdown that followed upon the triumph of capitalism and liberal democracy. If the vast wrestling audience (some 35 million people tune in to cable programs each week) is a barometer of American culture, then the nation is in trouble. Indeed, the very idea of the nation-state has become problematic. For wrestling has been denationalizing itself over the past decade, replacing the principle of the nation with the principle of the tribe.

The erosion of national identity in wrestling reflects broader trends in American society. If one wants to see moral relativism and even nihilism at work in American culture, one need only tune in to the broadcasts of either of the two main wrestling organizations, Vince McMahon's Worldwide Wrestling Federation and Ted Turner's World Championship Wrestling. (It is no accident that one of the pillars of professional wrestling is Turner's cable TV empire, which also brings us CNN, the anti-nation-state, global news channel.) Both the WWF and the WCW offer the spectacle of an America that has lost its sense of national purpose and turned inward, becoming wrapped up in manufactured psychological crises and toying with the possibility of substituting class warfare for international conflict. And yet we should remain open to the possibility that contemporary wrestling may have some positive aspects; for one thing, the decline of the old nationalism may be linked to a new kind of creative freedom.

*Paul A. Cantor is professor of English at the University of Virginia.*

## ii.

The history of pro wrestling as we know it begins after World War II and is roughly contemporary—not coincidentally—with the rise of television. Wrestling provided relatively cheap and reliable programming and soon became a staple for fledgling television stations. By the 1950s—and well into the '60s and '70s—wrestling was filling the airwaves with ethnic stereotypes, playing off national hostilities that had been fired up by World War II and restoked during the Korean conflict. Wrestling villains—always the key to whatever drama the bouts have—were often defined by their national origin, which branded them as enemies of the American way of life.

Many of the villains were at first either German or Japanese, but as memories of World War II faded, pro wrestling turned increasingly to Cold War themes. I wish I had a ruble for every wrestling villain who was advertised as the "Russian Bear," but the greatest of all who bore that nickname was Ivan Koloff. Looking for all the world like Lenin pumped up on steroids, he eventually spawned a whole dynasty of villainous wrestling Koloffs.



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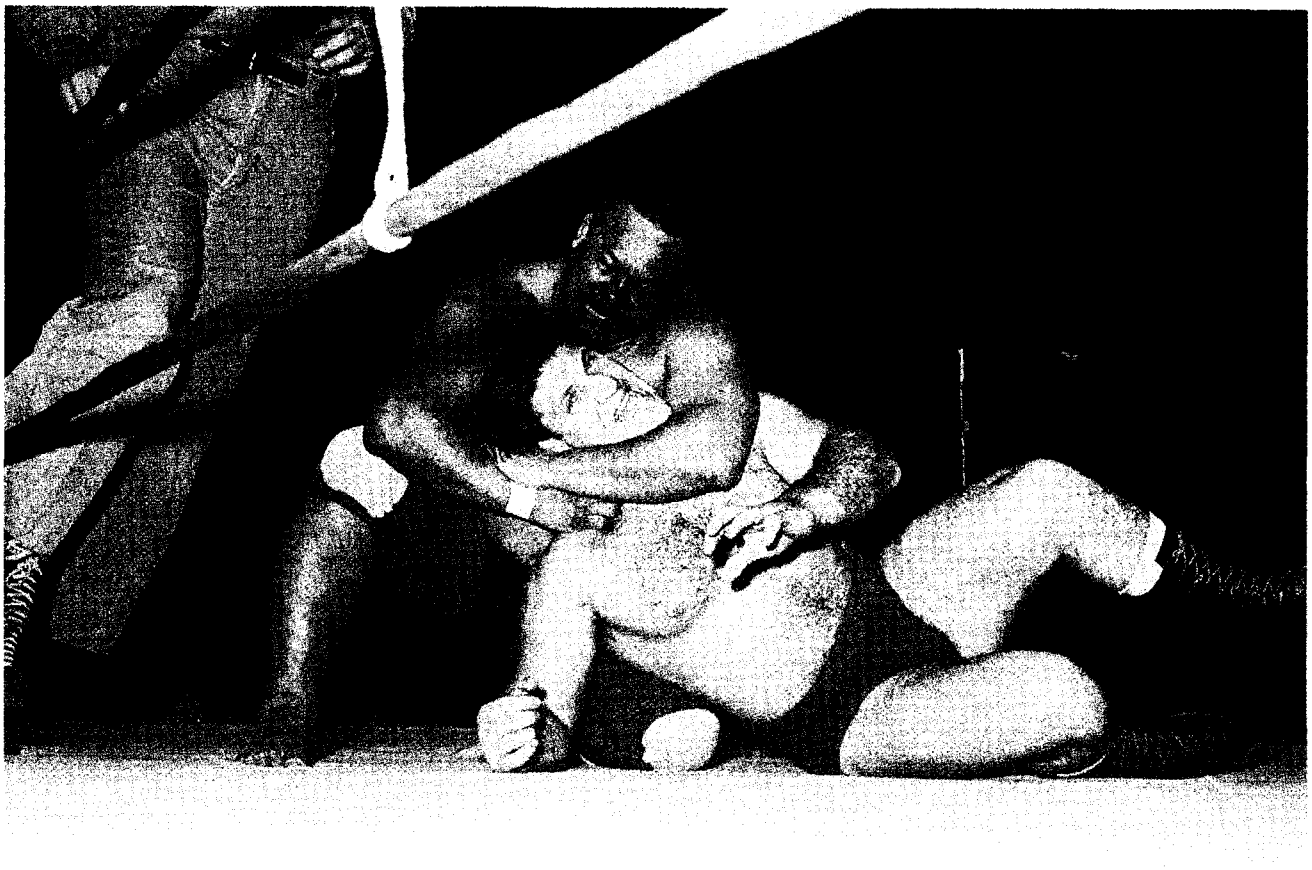

UPI/Corbis-Bettmann

*Professor Taro Tanaka has Bruno Sammartino in a stranglehold, on the last night of wrestling at the old Madison Square Garden, January 1968.*

The fact that the most successful of them was named Nikita shows that it was actually Khrushchev and not Lenin or Stalin who provided the model for the Russian wrestling villain. Time and again the Russian wrestler's pre-fight interview was a variation on "Ve vill bury you." Nikolai Volkoff used to infuriate American opponents and fans alike by waving a Soviet flag in the center of the ring and insisting on his right to sing the Soviet national anthem before his bout began.

To supplement its Russian villains, wrestling turned to the Arab Middle East, where a long tradition of ethnic stereotyping was readily available. During the years of tension between the United States and Iran, wrestling hit paydirt with a villain known as the Iron Sheik, who made no secret of his admiration for and close personal ties to the Ayatollah Khomeini. His pitched battles with the All-American GI, Sgt. Slaughter, became the stuff of wrestling legend. Not to be left behind by the march of history, during the Gulf War the Iron Sheik reinvented himself as Colonel Mustafa, and suddenly Americans had an Iraqi wrestler to hate.

The extent to which wrestling relied on national identity to manufacture its villains should not be overstated. Some of the greatest villains were home-grown, like Nature Boy Buddy Rogers, and some of the greatest heroes were foreign-born, like Bruno Sammartino. But although ethnic stereotyping was not essential to the emotional dynamics of wrestling, it did play a crucial role. That is why the end of the Cold War threatened to deliver a serious if not mortal blow to the whole enterprise. Suddenly audiences could not be counted upon to treat a given wrestler automatically as a villain simply because he was identified as a Russian. There was a brief, almost comic era of wrestling *glasnost*, during which the promoters tried to see if they could generate drama out of the shifting political allegiances of the Russian wrestlers. The extended Koloff family was riven by internal dissent, as some sided with Gorbachev and the reformers, while others remained hardliners and stuck by the old regime. But since Kremlinology has never been a popular spectator sport outside academia, the public quickly grew bored with trying to sort out the internal politics of the Koloff family, and it began to dawn on the wrestling moguls that the end of the Cold War was a threat to their franchise.

This problem was compounded by the fact that at roughly the same time as the Cold War was ending, ethnic stereotyping began to be anathematized. By the early '90s, the WWF even seemed to be testing whether it could capi-



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talize on the new era of political correctness. With Russia and virtually every other country ruled out as a source of villains, Vince McMahon and his brain trust searched the globe to see if any ethnic group remained an acceptable object of hatred. The result was a new villain named Colonel DeBeers—a white, South African wrestler with an attitude, who spoke in favor of apartheid during interviews. One can almost hear the wheels grinding in McMahon's head: "Russians may no longer be fair game, but no one will object to a little Boer-bashing." But wrestling fans did not take the bait. This was one of the few times the WWF misjudged its audience, proceeding as if its fans were sipping chardonnay and sampling brie instead of guzzling beer and munching on nachos. Colonel DeBeers was a flop as a villain and in some ways marked the end of a wrestling era—a last, desperate attempt to base physical conflict in the ring on political conflict outside it.

## iii.

Wrestling promoters have always been concerned that theirs is not a team sport and thus threatens to lack that extra measure of fan commitment that group solidarity can extract. Exploiting nationalist feeling had been one way of turning wrestling into something more than single combat. Instead of rooting for the home team, fans viewing a Sgt. Slaughter/Iron Sheik bout got to root for America. Or rather, America became the home team.

But there was also a germ of a team concept in wrestling's peculiar institution of the tag team—a bout in which two wrestlers pair up against a couple of opponents. And as ethnicity faded as a principle in wrestling, the WWF and the WCW began to expand tagteam partnerships into larger groupings that might best be described as extended families or tribes. The wrestlers in such tribes pool their resources to advance their careers, often illegally entering the ring to come to each other's aid, softening up each other's opponents for future matches, and generally creating trouble for any wrestler not within the tribe. These wrestling tribes adopt an outlaw pose within their larger leagues, refusing to conform to league rules and challenging the duly constituted wrestling authorities. The most famous of these groups is the New World Order (the nWo) within the WCW, which was headed by Hollywood Hulk Hogan and is constantly trying to outwit the league owners and take over the organization. It is surely one of the ironies of the end of history that in the aftermath of the Gulf War, that "vision thing" of George Bush's has left no more lasting monument than the name of a group of renegade wrestlers.

Tribal organization gives wrestling something intermediate between national identity and a purely individual identity. Fans almost have the sense of rooting for teams, since the wrestling tribes often have their own logos, uniforms, slogans, theme songs, cheerleaders, and other badges of communal or team identity. The wrestling brain trusts create ongoing storylines involving the various tribes, so that the future of the whole league, perhaps its very ownership, can seem to depend on the outcome of a given bout.

Thus the newly created tribal identities in wrestling can serve as substitutes for the old national identities. But one thing is missing—any sense of stability, the reassuring feeling of continuity that used to be provided by ethnic stereotyping in wrestling. Once a Russian, always a Russian, and, until the era of *glasnost*, that also meant always a villain as well. National identity is not a matter of choice; one is born into it and stuck with it, unless one chooses to betray one's national origins (at the height of the Koloff confusions, charges of "traitor" were routinely hurled back and forth in interviews). But in the world of wrestling today, which group a wrestler affiliates with appears to be a matter of personal choice (though in fact these "choices" are still scripted by the league). As it happens, the traditional national identities in wrestling were often made up. Both the "Manchurian" Gorilla Monsoon and the "Oklahoma Indian" Chief Jay Strongbow were in actuality Italian-Americans (Robert Marella and Joe Scarpa respectively), and the wrestler known as Nikolai Volkoff began his career as Bepo Mongol. In the contemporary era, though, wrestling virtually acknowledges that it is manufacturing its villains, and their roles are presented as a matter of personal choice rather than national destiny.

*Tribal organization gives wrestling something intermediate between national identity and a purely individual identity.*

Thus pro wrestling takes its place along with the plays of Samuel Beckett and the buildings of Michael Graves as an example of the dominant cultural mode of our age, postmodernism. The characters in Beckett's plays are not meant to represent real-live human beings, who might be said to lead an existence independent of the drama. Rather they are revealed to be fictions, consciously constructed characters who are themselves sometimes dimly aware that they are merely characters on stage. Graves's buildings are not meant to be "true" in the way the triumphs of modernist architecture were. Abandoning the modernist dogma that form follows function, Graves returns to



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architectural decoration, reminding us that his buildings are after all human constructions and thereby "deconstructing" them before our eyes. Pro wrestling has similarly entered its postmodern phase, in which it deliberately subverts any claims to truth and naturalness it ever had. Of course, at least since the era of television, pro wrestling has always been entertainment rather than real sport. But for decades pro wrestling at least pretended it was real. It now admits its fictionality, and indeed, like most forms of postmodernism, revels in it.

But can we confidently say that wrestling simply mirrors broader movements in our culture and politics? It is difficult to look at developments in politics and culture today and not see them as in turn mirroring developments in wrestling. Was Hulk Hogan, who dominated the 1980s, perhaps our first taste of Bill Clinton? The Hulkster—who could never talk about anything but himself, his own career, and his standing with his Hulkamaniac fans—was the model of a roguish, narcissistic, utterly unprincipled performer. While changing his stance from moment to moment, he was never held accountable by his adoring public, to the point where he seems to have gotten away with anything. If postmodern wrestling was not a forerunner of postmodern politics, why is Jesse "The Body" Ventura now the governor of Minnesota?

*Was Hulk Hogan—the roguish, narcissistic, utterly unprincipled performer—perhaps our first taste of Bill Clinton?*

## *iv.*

When the villainy of wrestlers was rooted in their national identity, their evil was presented as inherent in their natures. Related to genuine political conflicts in the actual world, the evil of a Russian wrestler seemed real. But villainy has become something more fluid and elusive in the era of postmodern tribalism. Since the contemporary wrestler appears to choose his tribal affiliations, he also gets to choose whether to be a hero or a villain (again, these matters are carefully scripted by the WWF and the WCW authorities, but we are talking about how things are meant to appear to the wrestling public). The most striking characteristic of post-Cold War wrestling is the dizzying rapidity with which today's wrestlers switch from hero to villain and back again. Wrestlers used to spend their whole careers defined as either good guys or bad guys. Now they alter their natures so often that it no longer makes sense to speak of them as natural heroes or villains in the first place. The contemporary wrestler exemplifies the thoroughly postmodern idea that human identity is purely a construction, a matter of choice, not nature.

With its underpinnings in traditional notions of morality, heroism, and patriotism eroded, wrestling has turned to new sources to hold the interest of its fans. Generally these sources have been found in the dramas of private life. Televised wrestling has always had much in common with soap operas. Fans identify heroes and villains and get wrapped up in ongoing struggles between them and especially the working out of longstanding and complex feuds. Throughout its history, pro wrestling has occasionally sought to involve fans in the private lives of its warriors. Once in a while a wrestler has gotten married in the ring to his female manager or valet. (More recently—reflecting a loosening of morality—female companions of wrestlers have been at stake in matches, with the winner claiming the right to take possession of his opponent's woman.) Personal grudges have always been central to wrestling, but over the last decade they have gotten ever more personal, often involving family members who somehow get drawn into conflict inside or outside the ring.

In short, wrestling conflicts have come increasingly to resemble the appalling family feuds aired on *The Jerry Springer Show*. This is only fair, since Springer seems to have modeled his show on wrestling interviews. Wrestlers used to get angry with each other because one represented the Soviet Union and the other the United States, and the two ways of life were antithetical. Now when wrestlers scream at each other, dark domestic secrets are more likely to surface—sordid tales of adultery, sexual intrigue, and child abuse.

Here a wrestler with the evocative name of Kane is emblematic. Kane was introduced in the WWF as the counterpart of a well-established villain called the Undertaker, who often punishes his defeated opponents by stuffing them into coffins (a nasty case of adding interment to injury). Kane's aptly named manager, Paul Bearer, soon revealed that Kane is in fact the Undertaker's younger brother. Kane wears a mask to hide the frightening facial burns he suffered as a child in a fire set by his older brother, which killed their parents. Thus the stage is set for a series of epic battles between Kane and the Undertaker, as the younger brother seeks revenge against the older. Paul Bearer then reveals that Kane and the Undertaker are actually only half-brothers, and that he himself fathered the younger boy, though he neglected him for years and is only now acknowledging paternity. With its Kane storyline, the WWF crafted a myth for the '90s. All the elements are there: sibling rivalry, disputed parentage, child



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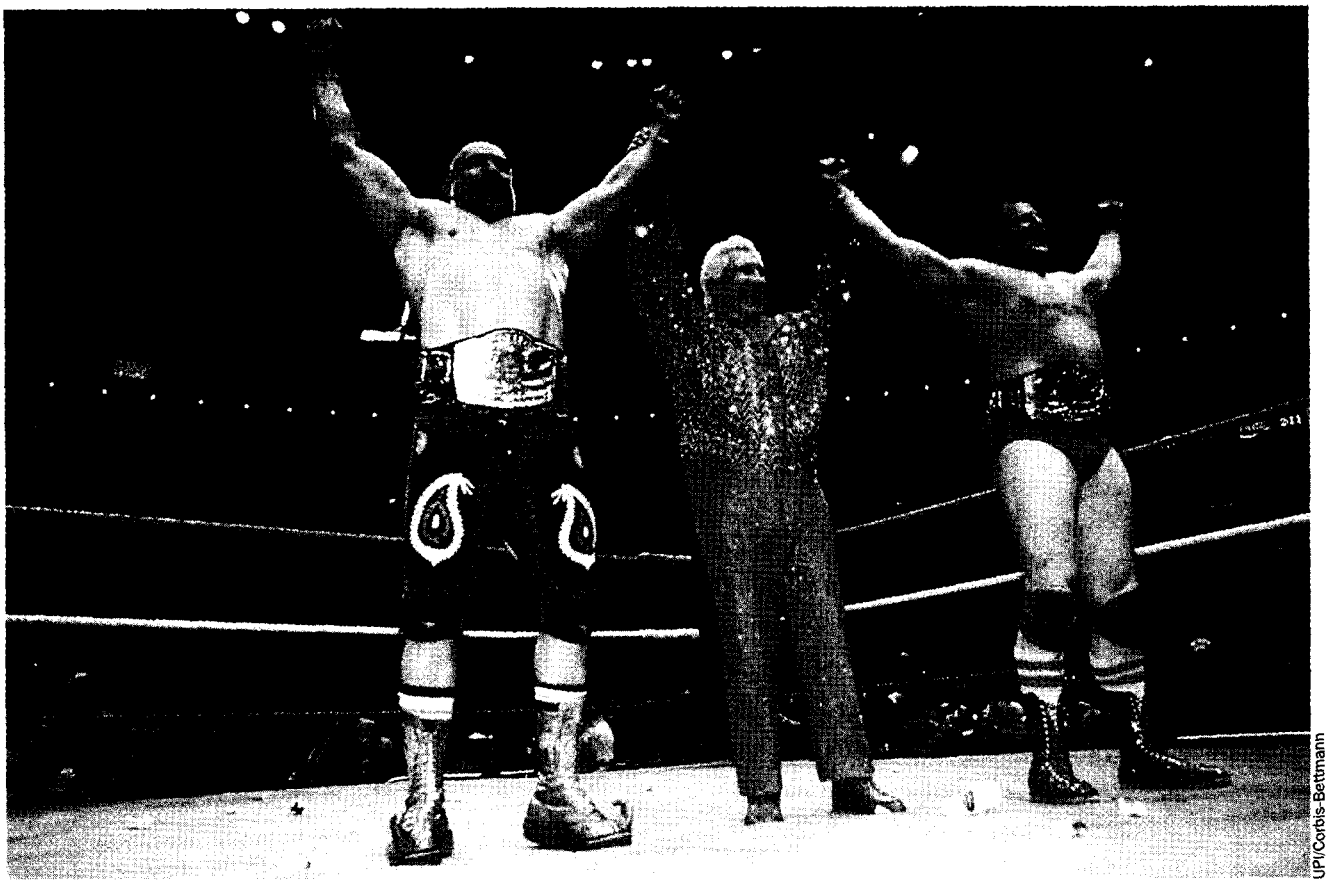
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*The Iron Sheik (left) an old-fashioned villain who achieved greatness during the Iranian hostage crisis*

neglect and abuse, domestic violence, family revenge.

McMahon and his brain trust have once again proven that they have a finger on the pulse of America. In the wake of years of psychotherapy, Twinkie defenses, and the O.J. trial, they have reinvented the villain as himself a victim. No one ever felt a need to explain the evil of Russian wrestlers—they were presented as villainous by nature. But unlike his biblical counterpart, Kane is supplied with motivation for his evil, and therefore inevitably becomes a more sympathetic figure. After all, his problems started when he was just a little kid. Kane is in fact a huge man named Glen Jacobs: six-feet seven-inches tall and weighing 345 pounds. Yet when he climbs into the ring, he stands as the poster boy for the '90s—the victimized wrongdoer, the malefactor who would not be evil *if only someone had loved him as a child*.

The other victim of society now celebrated by pro wrestling is the poor, abused working man, symbolized by "Stone Cold" Steve Austin, currently enmeshed in a bitter feud with Vince McMahon and the entire power structure of the WWF. In his unceasing search for suitable villains, McMahon finally hit upon the most villainous person he could think of—himself. In the ultimate postmodern convolution, wrestling now focuses on itself as a business and makes its own corruption the central theme of its plots. McMahon has decided to build his storylines around ongoing labor-management disputes in the WWF. He is in constant public conflict with his wrestlers, trying to force them to do his bidding and above all to make his on-again, off-again champion Austin toe the corporate line.

In his quest to gain an edge on Turner's WCW, McMahon realized he could tap into the resentment the average working man feels against his boss. McMahon is always threatening to downsize the WWF wrestling staff and has surrounded himself with corporate yes-men. Austin is his perfect working class opponent—a beer-drinkin', foot-stompin', truck-drivin', hell-raisin' Texas son-of-a-gun, always prepared to tell McMahon: "You can take this job and shove it." With this storyline, wrestling has completed its turn inward, moving from the Cold War to class war. Ironically, even at the height of the Cold War, wrestling never went after Russian communism with half the fervor it now devotes to pillorying American big business. If wrestling is any indication, the United States—deprived of any meaningful external enemy—seems to have nothing better to do than attack itself. Why not go after a bunch of tobacco companies, for example?

The McMahon-Austin feud proved to be so successful



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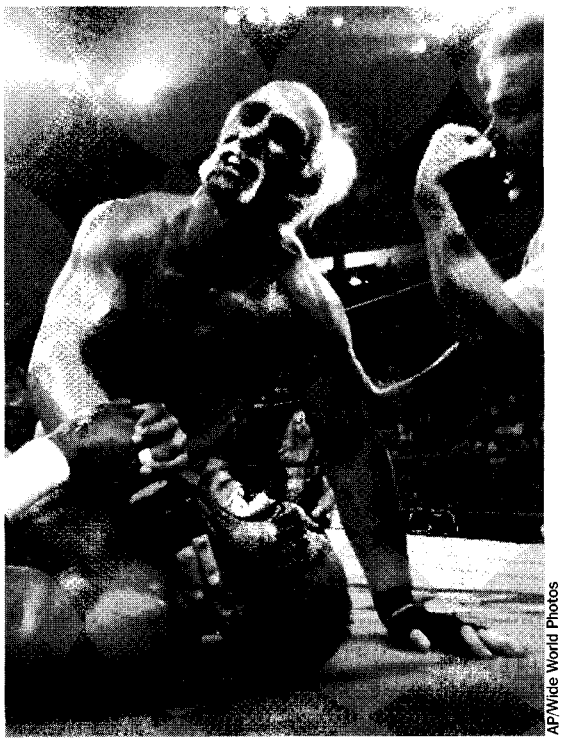
that Turner's WCW soon began imitating it, using its chief executive, Eric Bischoff (a former wrestler himself) to play the role of corporate bad guy. Always one step ahead of his competition, McMahon went on to fuse the family soap opera aspect of wrestling with the class warfare element by involving his son, his daughter, and eventually even his wife in his corporate struggles. These storylines have become increasingly bizarre, with McMahon's son Shane first seeming to betray him and then revealed to have been secretly acting on his behalf all along, and his daughter Stephanie set up for a kind of wrestling dynastic marriage and then kidnapped under weird circumstances. Who would have thought a century ago when wrestling began with a simple full nelson and a step-over toehold that it would eventually culminate in a proxy fight? But that is exactly what happened when McMahon's wife and daughter shocked him by voting their shares in the WWF to make Austin CEO, thereby transforming the board meetings back in Connecticut beyond recognition. (Austin brought a case of beer to his first session as president.) No wonder McMahon is about to take his corporation public.



AP/Wide World Photos

*Hollywood Hulk Hogan: Clinton prototype?*

## V.

Every time I think wrestling has reached rock bottom, either the WWF or the WCW finds its way to a new moral depth. A recent plot line culminated in Austin holding a gun to McMahon's head in the center of the ring, as the nattily attired owner/operator of the WWF appeared to wet himself in terror. When one looks at wrestling's "progress" from the 1950s to the 1990s, one really has to be concerned about America's future. If wrestling tells us anything about our country—and its widespread and sustained popularity suggests that it does—for the past three decades we have been watching a steady erosion of the country's moral fiber, and America's growing incapacity to offer functional models of heroism.

On the other hand, perhaps we should cease being moralistic for a moment, recognize that wrestling is only entertainment, and try to look beyond its admittedly grotesque antics. Though it is tempting to become nostalgic for the good old days of American patriotism in wrestling, let's face it: The traditional national stereotypes did become tired, overused, and predictable. In that sense, the end of the Cold War actually proved to be liberating for wrestling, as one might hope it could be for all American society. What appeared to be a loss of ethnic stereotyping proved to be a gain in creative freedom, as wrestling was forced to scour popular culture to come up with alternatives to traditional villains. Wrestling may not be more moral these days, but it certainly is more interesting and inventive. This development suggests that maybe we all need to be thinking beyond the nation-state as our chief cultural unit.

After all, the nation-state has not always been the dominant form of cultural or even political organization. It is largely a development out of 16th-century France, and has never as fully prevailed around the world as historians would have us think. There is no reason to believe that the nation-state as we know it is the perfect or even the best unit of political organization. When Aristotle made his famous statement usually translated as "man is a political animal," what he really was saying is that man is an animal whose nature it is to live in the *polis*—the Greek city conceived as the comprehensive human community, on a scale much smaller than a modern nation-state. Thus Aristotle would have said that the nation-state is an unnaturally large and even overblown form of community.

Perhaps what appears to be the end of history is only the end of the nation-state, and humanity is now groping confusedly toward new modes of political organization, which may be at once more global and more local in their scope. Today's professional wrestling points in these two directions simultaneously. At any moment of deep historical change, it is easy to become fixated on what is being lost and fail to see what is being gained. The way wrestling has been struggling to find some kind of postnational identity reflects a deeper confusion in our culture as a whole, but one that may portend a profound and even beneficial reorganization of our lives in the coming century. Perhaps, then, when we watch—and enjoy—the WWF and the WCW, we really are wrestling with the end of history. ♦



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# A Demilitarized Palestinian State

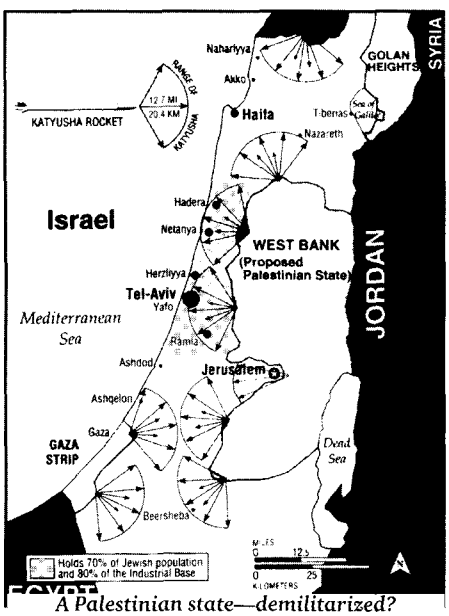
## Should Israel, should the world, rely on it?

Even those most sanguine about the Oslo Accord, the understanding between Israel and the Palestinians, are agreed that the Palestinian entity to be formed will have to be demilitarized. A demilitarized Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza Strip, it is believed, would obviate any military threat to the state of Israel.

## What are the facts?

**Israel threatened by enemies.** Israel is a very small country. Including the Golan and the "West Bank," it is only one-half the size of San Bernardino County in California. Israel has been in a "cold peace" with Egypt since 1978 and has also concluded a peace treaty with Jordan. Other Arab states are still in a declared or undeclared state of war with Israel. Iran, Moslem though not Arab, is the most determined and deadly of them all. It lurks in the background, its foremost military and political objective being the destruction of the state of Israel.

The Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), with which Isreal's Rabin government has signed a "peace agreement," is a terror organization that has only one purpose: to kill Jews and to destroy the state of Israel. While the latter objective is beyond its reach, it has been most successful in the former. It seems almost incomprehensible that a group as supposedly level-headed as a previous government of Israel would have entered into a "peace agreement" with such an organization. Unfortunately, though not surprisingly, events since the famous "handshake" confirm such skepticism. Despite statements to the contrary, the PLO has still not complied with Israel's main requirement, namely that it forswear the clauses in its "covenant" that call for the destruction of Israel. Arafat and his lieutenants continue to make blood-curdling speeches to the Arab public, beyond Western TV cameras, in which they re-assert their old goal of destroying Israel in "stages"—first by creating a Palestinian state to foment an allied all-out assault against the critically vulnerable Jewish state.




*A Palestinian state—demilitarized?*

**The myth of demilitarization.** The assumption that "Palestine" would be demilitarized is not tenable. The Arab nations would not allow it, even if the Palestinians themselves so desired. Also, the Palestinian entity would have thousands of trained soldiers, camouflaged as police. They could be helicoptered in minutes to positions on the border with Israel, with armored forces from Syria reaching them within the same night. But such mobilization of the "demilitarized" Palestine wouldn't be required. The weapons of preference of Arab terrorists are the Soviet-made Katyushas, highly effective missiles, truck-mounted and mobile, ideal for hit-and-run raids against Israel. Israel could not prevent them from flooding Palestine. A look at the map makes clear that these rockets, short-range though they may be, would dominate the heartland of Israel. Easily moved and hidden along Israel's new eastern borders—to be increased from less than 40 miles in length to over 200 miles—these Katyushah rockets would rain destruction over most of Israel. They would cover in their entirety Israel's narrow waist that holds 70% of the Jewish population of the country, 80% of its industrial base, its only international airport, and its most important military installations.

The Arabs living in Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") danced on the roofs of their homes when Iraqi Scud missiles fell on Tel Aviv during the Gulf War. Since the signing of the "peace agreement" they have continued to engage in terror and murder against the Jews. Only incurable optimists can believe that an independent Palestine would become a peaceful neighbor of Israel. If Israel ceded the Gaza Strip—the invasion route since before biblical times—and Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") to its sworn enemies it would make the country indefensible and Israel would have laid the groundwork for its own destruction. Tanks, warplanes, and missiles would only be needed for the final mopping-up process. In the meantime, mortars and Katyushas located on the Judean ridges—Israel's proposed new borders—would suffice to paralyze life and industrial and military activity in Israel. One can only hope that ultimately Isreal's leaders will clearly understand this danger and that they will not make concessions that will endanger the security of their country.

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# Is Russia Really 'Lost'?

*By the standards of its history and its neighborhood, post-Communist Russia is doing just fine.*

**By Leon Aron**

Suddenly everyone is asking, Who lost Russia? The *New York Times Magazine* posed the question in a cover story last August, and it has since been the subject of long articles in the *Times* and the *Washington Post*, as well as of innumerable columns in major newspapers. The op-ed pieces in the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal* have been virtually indistinguishable in their anti-Russian animus (a coincidence that ought to give pause to the editors of both papers). With the Republicans in the House of Representatives threatening hearings on the matter and Governor Bush's presidential campaign turning the issue into a major avenue of attack on the Clinton-Gore record, an irredeemable Russia is likely to remain a fixture of political discussion in the coming months.

Unfortunately, this important debate is being conducted like a kangaroo court. Not only have the accused—both Americans and, especially, Russians—been tried and found guilty in absentia, but, contrary to the Anglo-Saxon legal tradition, the discovery stage, when the underlying facts are established and each side presents its version of events, has been skipped entirely. Before the sentence is handed down, ought we not at least try to find out whether, in fact, a crime has taken place: Has Russia, indeed, been "lost" to the cause of the free market and democracy?

A hodgepodge of facts, half-truths, clichés, and distortions, the case for the prosecution comes down to a few simple postulates. First, free-market reforms have failed to make Russia a prosperous country with a growing GDP. "Reform" (a word rarely used without quotes these days) was nothing but the "entrenchment of a kleptocracy in which corrupt officials ally with a few business magnates to send wealth out of the country," according to Fritz Ermarth in the *New York Times* of September 12. "Reform" never enjoyed even a modicum of popular support but was forced on a defenseless country by "reformers around Yeltsin" and their Western, especially International Monetary Fund, advisers with the connivance of the White House. After eight years, goes the indictment, Russia still does not have even an approximation of a market economy. Instead, "reform" resulted in universal impoverishment. Today's Russia is a handful of thieving "oligarchs" feasting amidst the general penury.

In the political sphere, democratic institutions have not taken root. This "Weimar Russia" is an unstable, "failing state," in the words of Condoleezza Rice, George W. Bush's top foreign policy adviser, who has mentioned Russia in the same breath as the "failed states" of North Korea and Iraq. As House majority leader Dick Armey so elegantly put it, "Russia has become a looted and bankrupt zone of nuclearized anarchy."

In foreign policy, asserts the prosecution, Boris Yeltsin has not delivered where America's core national interests are concerned, and the "investment" in him by the Clinton administration was wrong and a waste. All these failures have soured the Russians on capitalism, democracy, the West in general, and the United States in particular and made them ripe for Communist *revanche*, anti-Western nationalist dictatorship, or an even scarier combination of the two.

One of the most puzzling features of the argument that Russia has been "lost" is its ahistoricism. Post-Communist Russia is discussed as if it had no past. There seems to be total amnesia about the conditions that were so memorably exposed by *glasnost* in the waning years of the Soviet Union. For instance, in 1989, the last year of relative stability before the crisis became uncontrollable, the average salary in the Soviet Union was 200 rubles a month: $33 at the official exchange rate, $13 on the—still illegal—free currency market. (The average salary in Russia today is $75.) The Soviet Union was in 77th place in the world in personal consumption. Of 211 essential food products, only 23 were regularly available in state stores. Russians spent between 40 and 68 hours a month in queues.

When Kuzbass miners walked off the job in July 1989,

*Leon Aron is a resident scholar and director of Russian studies at the American Enterprise Institute. His biography of Boris Yeltsin will be published in January.*



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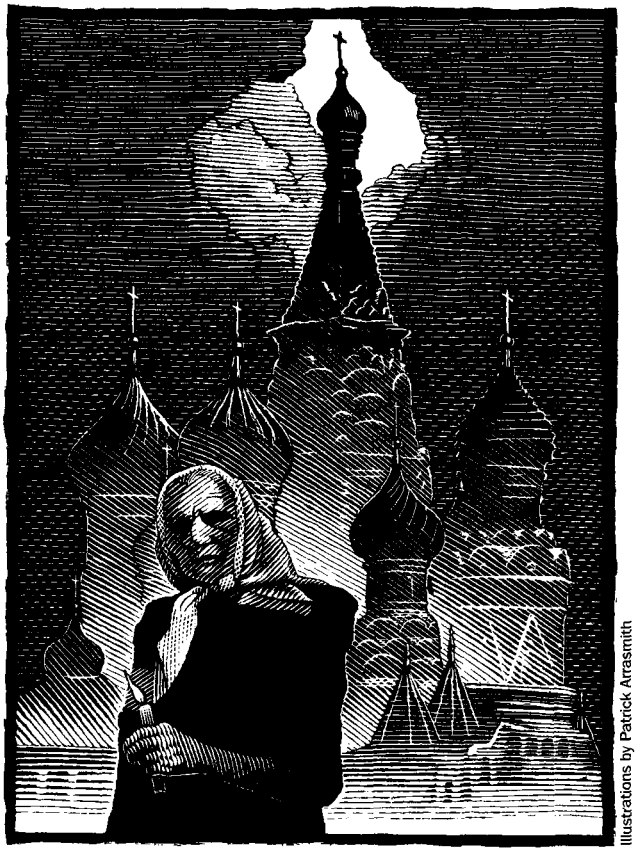
precipitating Russia's first national strike since 1918, their demands included a towel and 800 grams of soap a month for after-shift washing, and padded cotton jackets. As part of the settlement, the government agreed to deliver to Kuzbass 10,000 tons of sugar, 3,000 tons of washing powder, 3,000 tons of soap, over 6,000 tons of meat, 5 million cans of dairy products, and 1,000 tons of tea.

According to the minister of health, a total of 1,200,000 hospital beds (35 percent of the total) were in facilities with no hot water; every sixth hospital bed was in a facility with no running water at all; 30 percent of Soviet hospitals did not have indoor toilets. The Soviet Union had a higher rate of infant mortality than 49 nations, behind Barbados and the United Arab Emirates. Half of Soviet schools had no central heating, running water, or indoor toilets.

By the time Boris Yeltsin took over Russia in the fall of 1991, the country's economy was collapsing. Domestic production declined by 13 percent that year, the budget deficit soared to 30 percent of GDP, the annual inflation rate was 93 percent, hard currency and gold reserves were nearly exhausted, and the USSR defaulted on its international loans. No one who was in Moscow in the fall of 1991 will ever forget the absolutely bare shelves of the stores, the ration coupons for sugar, tobacco, and soap, and the sacks of potatoes stored on the balconies of apartment buildings in the center of Moscow, as their inhabitants prepared for famine.



Illustrations by Patrick Arrasmith

Brief as it is, this sketch belies the postulate of a Russia "ruined" by reform. The picture we are offered of a handful of oligarchs presiding over a sea of starving millions is an equally crude caricature. Today the queues in stores—bane of four generations of Russians—have disappeared, and Russian shops, for the first time since the mid-1920s offer a cornucopia of quality food and goods. In 1997, for the first time in 40 years, Russia was self-sufficient in grain. In fact, it exported millions of tons of grain in 1998, even as agro-bureaucrats in the Kremlin and the U.S. Department of Agriculture were arranging shipments from the United States to meet a nonexistent emergency.

While it is true that millions of people—especially retirees, collective farmers, and workers in the mammoth military-industrial complex—were impoverished by galloping inflation and cuts in state spending, millions more—urban, younger, and better educated (who voted for Yeltsin in overwhelming numbers in the 1996 presidential election)—saw a dramatic improvement in their professional and personal lives. For the first time in Russian history, there is a sizable middle class and intelligentsia outside state employ. Before the crisis of August 1998, almost one-fifth (18 percent) of Russians surveyed stated that the economic situation of their own family was improving. Between 1990 and 1997, car ownership increased by 72 percent from 18 per 100 families to 31. Of the total population of 150 million, 20 million Russians were estimated by tax agencies to have traveled abroad in 1997. According to the World Tourism Organization, in a country-by-country ranking of top-spending tourists in 1996, Russians came tenth, behind Americans, Germans, and Japanese, but ahead of South Koreans, Brazilians, Spaniards, and Chinese.

The new Russian middle class suffered greatly in the crisis of 1998, and it may take a few years for the standard of living to return to pre-crash levels. Yet there is no reason to doubt that this will happen. It may currently be all the rage in Washington to speak of Russia's "virtual economy," but we are suddenly discovering that a Russian market economy does exist after all and, despite its deep distortions, responds to economic stimuli much as any market economy would. In full accordance with supply-side theory, the continuing absence of price controls, a cheaper but stable national currency, and a drastic reduction of imports have unleashed domestic production. Russian-made food and goods fill the stores. Industrial production (or rather its registered and taxable part) was 4.5 percent higher in the first six months of 1999 than in the first six months of 1998, and it grew even faster after



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that. Contrary to many a forecast, there is no starvation.

With the demise of astronomic interest rates and of the fantastically lucrative domestic bond market, money that used to flow into treasury bills is becoming available to industry. There is less and less barter. The RTS index of top Russian companies has grown 300 percent since October 1998. Exports declined by 5 percent in the first eight months of this year, and imports fell by 45 percent, leaving the country with a large trade surplus that is likely to stabilize the ruble. The cheaper ruble and a sharp increase in oil prices have greatly helped to reduce the budget deficit. In August, Russia collected more tax revenues than in any month in its eight-year post-Communist history (30.8 billion rubles, or $1.25 billion) and paid off all the state pension arrears, which had amounted to 26 billion rubles ($1 billion) in January 1999. Contrary to many a confident prediction of hyperinflation, the 1999 inflation rate is not likely to exceed 40 percent or the exchange rate to dip below 32 rubles to the dollar.

Breaking with the "state capitalism" of the "oligarchs," thousands of young entrepreneurs, many of whom got their start in the oligarchs' financial empires and made fortunes in Treasury-bill trading, currency speculation, and arbitrage, are starting new businesses and investing their own money in pharmaceuticals, paper, dozens of new brands of beer, packaged snacks, and clothing. Bypassing the largely insolvent Moscow banks, which have been little more than currency-trading and bond-recycling stations, successful Russian firms are acting as small banks, investing their profits often outside their immediate sectors and making loans to other businesses.

Another mainstay of the thesis that Russia has been "lost" is the claim that the Russians have rejected capitalism. In fact, after three generations entirely in state employ, Russians remain sharply divided on the issue of private vs. state ownership of the economy. In a national poll commissioned by the United States Information Agency at the beginning of this year, 41 percent favored a "mostly" or "completely" state-owned economy, while 50 percent felt either that the economy should be "mostly" or "completely" privately owned (16 percent) or that it should be a "mix" of private and state ownership (34 percent).

In the 1995 Duma elections, 21 million votes (30 percent of the total) were cast for pro-reform and pro-government right-of-center parties, while the Communists and their allies received 22 million votes (32 percent). (Because of the splintering of the right-of-center parties, only Yabloko and Our Home is Russia crossed the 5 percent threshold required for Duma membership. A full 9.6 million votes cast for small right-of-center, pro-reform, and pro-government parties were wasted, and the Communists ended up with 35 percent more deputies than the right: 187 seats vs. 121 seats.)

Then there is the myth that Yeltsin won the 1996 presidential election by buying 40 million votes with the oligarchs' money. In reality, Russian voters that year made a monumental and informed choice worthy of a great people—a choice between two fundamentally different visions of Russia. Yeltsin ran on a platform of continuing but "modified" and "socially oriented" reforms, while Gennady Zyuganov, the Communist candidate, called for a return to state control (if not outright ownership) of the economy. Zyuganov presented his case to the public in a vigorous national campaign. Between January and July, the Communist alternative was expounded by over 150 pro-Communist local and national newspapers and magazines, the national dailies alone with a combined circulation of over 10 million. Tens of thousands of Communist organizers campaigned door to door. Millions of leaflets were distributed. And the Communists enjoyed three and a half hours of free prime time on national television and held hundreds of campaign rallies.

Although most Russians tell pollsters they are dissatisfied with the "way democracy works" in their country, sol-



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id majorities reject a restoration of "order" if the price is forgoing key civil and political liberties—habeas corpus limits on police, the freedom to hold political meetings and demonstrations, free elections, the right to travel abroad, and an uncensored press. In 1994 virtually equal proportions of respondents supported and opposed a dictatorship to "restore order in Russia" (35 percent and 33 percent respectively). In 1997, the opposition to a dictatorship grew to 55 percent, while support stagnated at 35 percent.

Allegedly a "failing" state and "zone of nuclearized anarchy," Russia in the past six years has held three free national elections (two parliamentary and one presidential), two national referenda, and in each of its 89 provinces at least one (sometimes two) election for a legislature and governor. On only one occasion—the Duma elections and simultaneous constitutional referendum in December 1993, three months after the bloodshed at Russia's parliament building—did turnout fall below 64 percent of eligible voters. Nearly 70 million Russians (just under 70 percent of all eligible adults) voted in the presidential election in 1996. There were 50 human rights groups in Russia in 1996. Today, there are 1,200.

This is a regime that—even with its many very real, even gross flaws—is the most open and liberal in the country's history. The press is free from government censorship. The opposition, no matter how radical, can publish and campaign for office. Free and fiercely competitive multi-candidate elections are the norm at both the local and national levels. After a thousand years of authoritarianism and totalitarianism, Russia is radically decentralized, yet whole, with political power dispersed both geographically among the regions and among diverse centers of power on the national level. No party (much less person, even the president) can dominate and mold Russian national politics at will.

Following the Constitutional Court's lead, local judges routinely rule against local government agencies (as when the latter tried to restrict the activities of "foreign" religious denominations), the Kremlin, the army (when it sought to punish conscientious objectors), and the secret police (as in the espionage cases of Captain Grigoriy Pas'ko in the Far East and Captain Alexander Nikitin in St. Petersburg). In a typical instance of citizens' taking on the government in court, last July an Internet provider in the southern city of Volgograd rejected the demand of the Federal Security Service that the company monitor its customers' use of the Web. The security agency retaliated by blocking the firm's use of the satellite channel that gave it access to the Web. The firm brought suit against the FSB, and a decision is pending.

Although woefully inadequate by the standards of older democracies, Russia is by far the freest, most democratic nation of all the post-Soviet states save the three Baltic countries. Even as severe a test as the past year's financial crisis, with the devaluation of the ruble and the government's default on its domestic debt, did not result in riots and the disintegration of authority, as in Indonesia, or in show trials of high-level scapegoats and the jailing of journalists, as in Malaysia. There was not the slightest infringement of human rights or political liberties, curtailment of the press, or harassment of the opposition. The Communists' attempt to capitalize on the crisis failed miserably when the much ballyhooed "Red October" turned out at best 200,000 people on the streets—in a country of 150 million.

Of all the grounds for arguing that Russia has been "lost," Yeltsin's alleged failure to deliver in foreign and security policies is the most astonishing, because the evidence to the contrary is unambiguous. Never before has there been a Russian regime whose foreign and security policies were so beneficial for the United States and its allies.

First, of course, there was the demilitarization of the state and society, the scope of which is likely without precedent in modern history for an undefeated country. Estimated in the 1980s to consume at least 30 percent of GDP, Soviet defense-related expenditures were estimated last year by the "godfather of *glasnost*," Alexander Yakovlev, and then-foreign minister Yevgeny Primakov to have been more like 70 percent of the USSR's GDP. (Now, there's the "looting" of Russia for you, which reduced to poverty one of the world's potentially richest countries!) In 1992, acting prime minister Yegor Gaidar cut defense spending by 80 percent. By 1996, expenditures for procurement and military construction were nine times lower than in 1990 and for research and development ten times lower.

This year, Russia is spending 2.3 percent of GDP on defense. Between January 1992 and January 1998, the Russian armed forces shrank in manpower from 4 million to 1.2 million. But by far the most important development for U.S. national security is Russian nuclear disarmament. In 1991, Russia had 10,000 deployable strategic nuclear weapons. That number was reduced to 6,000 after START I went into effect in December 1994. Even though the Duma never ratified START II, Russia unilaterally cut its arsenal by 25 percent below the START I limit to 4,500 warheads today. Instead of adhering to the START II schedule of 3,000 to 3,500 warheads by the year 2007, Moscow proposed to the United States this past August to bring the totals to 1,500 weapons or fewer.

Another boon to the West—the peaceful dissolution of



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the Soviet domestic empire—exceeded virtually everyone's expectations and defied myriad gloomy scenarios. One need only recall the bloody divorces between India and Pakistan, Britain and Ireland, and, of course, Serbia and other republics of the former Yugoslavia to appreciate the immensity of Yeltsin's achievement. Signed by Yeltsin in Kiev on May 31, 1997, after painful territorial concessions to Ukraine made in the face of almost unanimous opposition from the leading politicians, the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Partnership between Russia and Ukraine is as critical to the stability of post-Cold War Europe as the French-German rapprochement engineered by Charles de Gaulle and Konrad Adenauer in 1958 was to the post-World War II order.

Time and again, Yeltsin took foreign policy positions distasteful not just to the "popular patriotic" Left but to most of the Russian political class. Repeatedly the president was offered on a silver platter opportunities to bolster his popularity by whipping up nationalism and anti-American hysteria—and every time, he declined, patching up frayed relations with Washington by accommodation and cooperation. Such was the case with NATO expansion; with sanctions against Iraq; with Bosnia and, despite hollers of protest from the Left and his own foreign ministry, with Kosovo. (Last spring, he fired the darling of the Moscow political class, Primakov, in large measure because of his stubborn opposition to Russia's cooperation with NATO over Kosovo.)

By far the most solid charge brought against Russia by the doomsayers is corruption. This scourge saps the legitimacy of the state, distorts the market, impedes foreign investment, and ultimately costs Russian consumers and taxpayers trillions of rubles every year. Before it was suddenly discovered by the "Who lost Russia?" crew, the subject had been discussed by scholars for years. The problem here is not that the critics have the facts wrong (although they indulge in hyperbole), but that they fail to locate this evil in its historic and geographic context.

Inconvenient though it may be to American columnists and members of Congress, the truth is that Northwest European-style capitalism—originally Protestant, Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian—is very rare in the world today. Most countries will require decades, perhaps centuries, of experience with the free market and democracy before they attain a similar standard. The going is likely to be especially rough in Russia's neighborhood—which, from Romania and Bulgaria to Turkey, Iran, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China, has been notoriously corrupt for centuries. Should recent allegations that the leaders of Bosnia have stolen $1 billion in international assistance prove true, that de facto NATO protectorate, a European country of 3.5 million people, will become the per capita world champion of corruption.

Like its neighbors, Russia has been corrupt for centuries. But corruption reached its apogee under the Communists. By extirpating, suppressing, or subverting the civil and governmental institutions that promote self-restraint and personal responsibility (the church, charities, professional associations, and an independent judiciary), by censoring everything that was published, by making the party *nomenklatura* immune from criminal prosecution, Soviet totalitarianism achieved universal thievery and bribery. "Tell me where you work, and I will tell you what you are carrying home in your bag," went a Soviet underground joke in the 1970s. In a superb primer on Soviet corruption (*USSR: The Corrupt Society*, written in the 1970s and published in the United States in 1982), a former leading Soviet legal scholar, Konstantin Simis, called the Soviet Union "the land of kleptocracy." Describing the country's "horrible moral state," Gorbachev's first prime minister, Nikolai Ryzhkov (now a Communist leader in the Duma), wrote of the country in the 1980s, "We stole from ourselves, we took bribes, we wallowed in lies."

The burden of this history is compounded by the realities of economic transition. In the no-man's-land between the state-controlled economy and the free market—where some restrictions have been removed while others remain, and former state property is left defenseless as a beached whale—the hungry, newly empowered entrepreneur meets the impoverished bureaucrat or politician, who sells him access to the beach. Corruption of this type was or is a problem in Carlos Menem's Argentina, Fernando Cordoso's Brazil, Carlos Salinas's Mexico, Kim Dae Jung's South Korea, Turgut Ozal's Turkey, Nelson Mandela's South Africa, and all the post-Communist nations without exception. (Russia, indeed, is the least corrupt of the countries of the former USSR, with the exception of the Baltics.)

Combining authoritarian politics and a partly free market, China epitomizes the process. In his book on China's "unfinished economic revolution," Nicholas R. Lardy of the Brookings Institution quotes the Communist party's own *People's Daily* as stating that "criminal activities in banking and finance are rampant." In an article entitled "Will China Become Another Indonesia?" Minxin Pei of the Carnegie Endowment reports that "corruption has reached epidemic proportions and resulted in the theft of huge amounts of national wealth." He estimates corruption costs China 4 percent of GDP annually.

Of course, neither history nor political culture absolves the guilty. They do, however, have clear policy



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implications. The roots of Russian corruption go much deeper than the alleged mistakes and personal frailties of Yeltsin and the "reformers." In societies where corruption is hereditary, the problem can be alleviated only by decades of democratic politics and press freedom, over several post-Communist generations. In the meantime, we ought to be realistic, patient, and firm in our rejection of sanctions against corrupt practices and officials.

Fortunately, dealing with corrupt regimes for the sake of overriding national or global interests poses no problem either for the United States or for world financial institutions. There is, of course, Italy, our steadfast NATO ally, a leading trading partner, a favorite vacation spot of millions of Americans—and a country of systemic and ubiquitous corruption, where an estimated 25 percent of all taxes go uncollected every year and where virtually the entire leadership of the Christian Democratic party, which had ruled the country for 50 years since the end of World War II, went to jail a few years ago.

Farther east, Ukraine—by all accounts a considerably more corrupt country than Russia—is the fourth largest recipient of direct U.S. assistance, receiving $195 million last year, while Russia got $130 million. Last year, Egypt, authoritarian and utterly corrupt, received $2.5 billion of U.S. taxpayers' money. To date, the IMF has extended almost $18 billion in loans to Mexico, almost $17 billion to South Korea, and over $8 billion to Indonesia—the most corrupt of them all. (As of this writing, Russia has received $15.6 billion from the IMF.) Nor, contrary to much pious hand-wringing, is corruption a total barrier to foreign investment, as Indonesia, Mexico, and especially China have amply demonstrated.

*It would be a blunder to make Russian corruption synonymous with the failure of Russia's grand experiment in free-market economics.*

It would be a terrible blunder to make Russian corruption synonymous with the failure of Russia's grand experiment in free-market economics. There is a critical distinction between the countries where corruption overwhelms the state and the economy and leads to a breakdown or permanent crisis (Albania, Indonesia, Venezuela, Colombia) and those where corruption, no matter how ubiquitous, still allows for democratic order, economic progress, and integration in the world economy (Italy, Turkey). Russia appears to be evolving along the latter path.

In his book *Abraham Lincoln and the Second American Revolution*, James McPherson, refuting revisionist historians' claim that the Civil War and Reconstruction accomplished little, charged his opponents with "presentism," a tendency to "read history backwards, measuring change over time from the point of arrival rather than the point of departure." McPherson compared this mode of observation to "looking through the wrong end of a telescope—everything appears smaller than it really is."

A similar distortion underlies the myth that Russia is "lost." Post-Communist Russia's epic experiment with self-rule, political liberty, and the free market is like the progress of a long and disorderly wagon train trekking across a vast and swampy plane, stopping, zigzagging, occasionally almost drowning in mud, yet stubbornly plowing forward. Following close behind but never quite catching up with the caravan is a crowd of journalists and experts. Their heads are hanging. They look neither forward, to see where the road might lead; nor back, to measure the astonishing distance already covered; nor even to the sides, to compare the caravan's progress with that of Russia's neighbors. They look only downward, at the dirt on the wheels, the ruts in the road, and the ugly swamp creatures awakened by the wagon train's passage and feasting on the refuse in its wake.

A longer and broader view yields different observations. There is a great deal in today's Russia that, to the citizen of a mature liberal democracy, appears flawed or even appalling. Yet measured from "the point of departure," the progress is undeniable and enormous.

The American Civil War and Reconstruction are relevant in another respect as well. Lincoln liberated 4 million slaves. Yeltsin (following in Gorbachev's footsteps) liberated 150 million Russians from Communist totalitarianism. Lincoln left his successors a country that his contemporaries could easily have pronounced "lost." Exhausted and cynical, it was in the throes of what Marx called "primary accumulation"—a crude and dynamic early capitalism, complete with crass inequalities, fraud, cruelty toward the weak and the vanquished, "robber barons," ubiquitous and vast corruption, unemployment, and, in 1873, economic depression. The South, mired in abject poverty and racism, after 1877 denied political and civil rights to its black citizens. Yeltsin is about to leave his country in much the same condition, minus, of course, the race question and the abrogation of liberties.

It took over 100 years to fully implement the promise of Lincoln's revolution. Although overcoming three quarters of a century of Communist rule is unlikely to prove much easier than eradicating two centuries of slavery, it seems safe to predict that Yeltsin's revolution will take less than a century to fulfill most Russians' hopes. ♦



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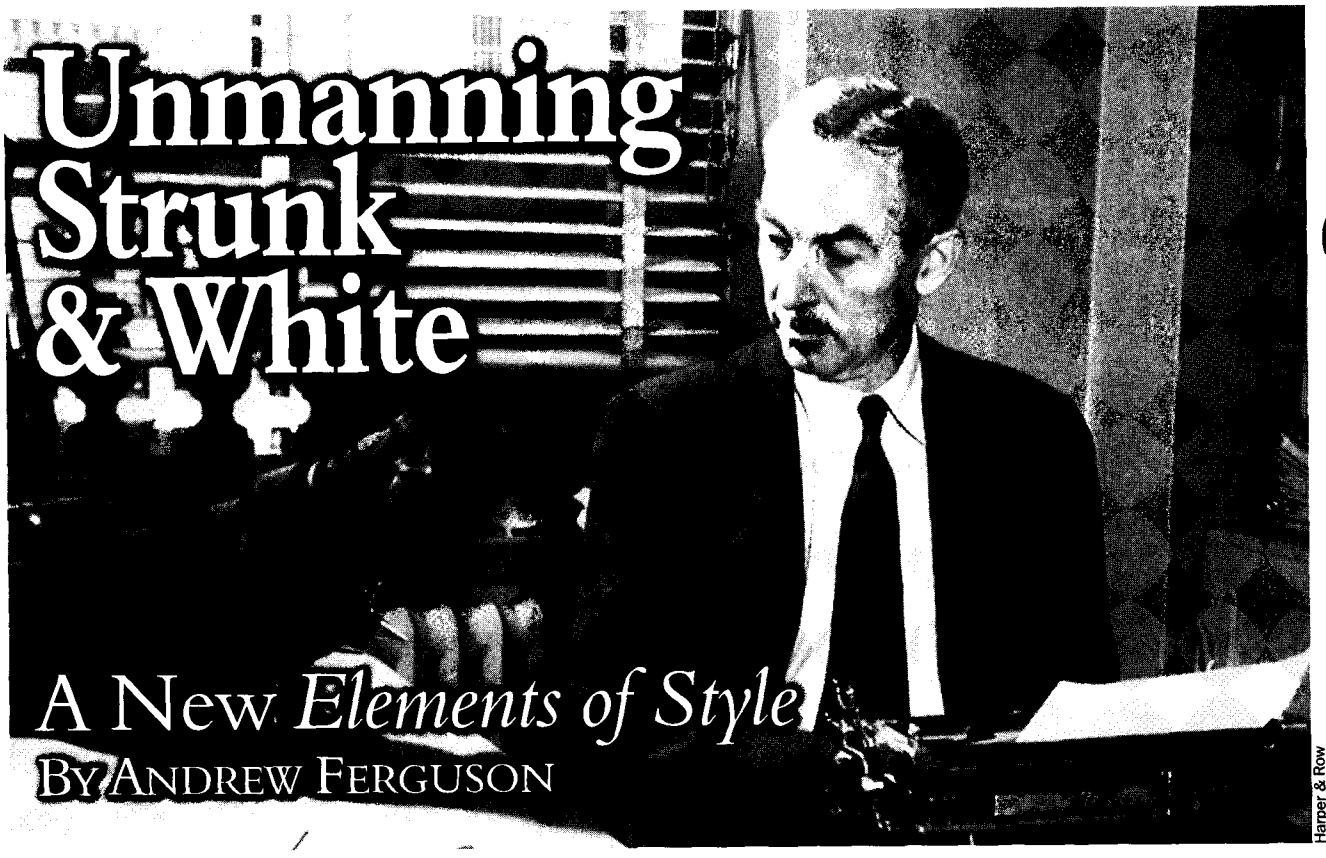
# Unmanning Strunk & White

## A New *Elements of Style*

BY ANDREW FERGUSON



Harper & Row

It's hard to imagine a book more misconstrued than *The Elements of Style*, or a writer more misjudged than E.B. White, who co-wrote "the little book" with William Strunk Jr. This year is the centenary of White's birth, and looking through the handful of news articles that have marked the occasion I see he's sometimes referred to, by newspaper editorialists, op-ed writers, and other enthusiasts, as "America's foremost man of letters" or even "the greatest essayist of the century." A humorous man with a high but realistic estimation of his gifts, White would have enjoyed the extravagance of the claim, coming at the end of a century that produced George Orwell, G.K. Chesterton, Rebecca West, Edmund Wilson—essayists who swung the heavy lumber and hit the long ball, as White, a miniaturist by inclination, did not and did not try to do.

All the same, White was an amiable and disarming writer, the kind whose influence, if you discover it at a certain age, is almost always wholesome and hard to shake off. He was just a journalist but a superior one. His legacy, as the legacy of deadline writers tends to be, consists not of any one or two great works but of the desultory leavings that survive a fifty-year career in the trade: perhaps a half-dozen enduring essays, a few memorable scraps of light verse, a long and enjoyable volume of letters, and three well-loved children's books, including *Charlotte's Web*. It's a pretty fair basket of goods. And of course it includes *The Elements of Style*, which has just been revised for the first time since White's death in 1985.

**The Elements of Style**
*Fourth Edition*
by William Strunk Jr.
and E.B. White
Allyn and Bacon, 105 pp., $6.95

This is the fourth edition of *The Elements of Style*. Since its commercial debut in 1959, it has sold more than ten million copies, at an average clip of a quarter-million a year, making it easily the most successful American textbook ever published. This spring, Random House's Modern Library, in yet another gimmicky millennial list, placed *The Elements* at number twenty-one on its selection of the hundred best nonfiction books of the century; not to be outdone, a few months later a team of New York City librarians chose it as one of their "twenty-one classics for the twenty-first century."

For durability and popular appeal, *The Elements of Style* has to be reckoned more than a textbook. But why this should be so is not at all clear. The little book is often praised for reasons that seem suspect. In an afterword to the new edition, the CBS news personality Charles Osgood boasts of carrying the book in his pocket at all times. (Osgood is one of those TV commentators who is known among his peers as a "writer's writer"; and like other great TV stylists he employs a ghostwriter. Maybe he means he pockets the ghostwriter, who carries *The Elements* for him.) The implication of such boasts—Osgood is not the first to make it—is that a careful writer must have the book constantly at the ready, to settle a dispute about, say, the use of the conditional in the subjunctive mood.

The only problem is that, as a comprehensive guide to grammar and usage, *The Elements* is nearly useless. Running fewer than a hundred pages in most editions, it is not a sweeping

*Andrew Ferguson is a senior editor at* THE WEEKLY STANDARD.



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survey of the scene, and was never intended to be. Its design consists of eleven "Elementary Rules of Usage," eleven "Elementary Principles of Composition," a chapter on "Matters of Form," another on "Words and Expressions Commonly Misused," a closing essay on the act of writing—and that's it. (The new edition adds a glossary, which makes the book more serviceable than its predecessors, but only slightly.) The "rules" and "principles" are maddeningly spotty; vast areas of grammar go unmentioned altogether. If Osgood really wants to settle those heated arguments about syntax that must erupt routinely among the craftsmen in the CBS newsroom—or, for that matter, if a student just wants to know what the hell an appositive is—he will be better off leaving *The Elements* in his pocket and buying a copy of the *MLA Style Manual* or any one of a dozen others that actually treat the subject with encyclopedic breadth and detail.

No, Charles Osgood notwithstanding, *The Elements of Style* is something else entirely—something much less than many of its partisans pretend, and something much greater, too.

The eccentric design of the book makes sense in light of its origins. *The Elements of Style* was first published in 1918 by its author, a Cornell professor named Will Strunk. Strunk himself was the one who tagged *The Elements* "the little book." He printed it privately for classroom use by students in his composition course, among whom was E.B. White. Nearly forty years later, in the spring of 1957, White received a surviving copy in the mail from an old college friend. Charmed, he set down an appreciation of the book and its author for the *New Yorker*.

"'The little book' has long since passed into disuse," he wrote. "Will died in 1946, and he had retired from teaching several years before that. Longer, lower textbooks are in use in English classes nowadays, I dare say—books with upswept tail fins and automatic verbs. I hope some of them manage to compress as much wisdom into as small a space, manage to come to the point as quickly and amusingly."

The day after White's essay appeared an editor at Macmillan took the hint—if a hint is what White intended—and wrote him asking to see a copy of Strunk's book and wondering whether White's piece might be used as an introduction to a new edition. White sent along his copy, with a note expressing some reservations. "Whether the book has virtues that

would recommend it to teachers of English, I don't feel qualified to say. . . . Sometimes the book, like the man, seems needlessly compressed, and it is undeniably notional." He mentioned its lack of comprehensiveness, the large gaps in its survey of grammar and usage. White had a theory to explain this odd construction. "I think [Strunk] felt the need for a labor-saving device in correcting papers. With the 'little book' in the hands of his students, he could simply write in the margin of a theme: 'See Rule 2.'"

Despite his doubts, White offered his help if Macmillan wanted to reissue the book. He had two conditions. First, though Strunk's copyright had lapsed, Macmillan would have to get permission from his heirs and pay them royalties. (To this day royalties are split equally between the White and Strunk families—a handsome annuity that must amount to several hundred thousand dollars.) And second, he wanted the chance to comb through the book, bring it up to date, and offer some of his own thoughts on the subject of rhetoric.

Though always a slow worker, he thought the project would take him a month. It took nearly two years.

"I discovered," he wrote many years later, "that for all my fine talk I was no match for the parts of speech—was, in fact, over my depth and in trouble. Not only that, I felt uneasy at posing as an expert on rhetoric, when the truth is I write by ear, always with difficulty and seldom with any exact notion of what is taking place under the hood."

There were other problems. As White dug into the book its inadequacies became more apparent. "Omit needless words," Strunk had written in Rule Seventeen, and the professor had followed his own advice so rigorously that he often omitted essential words, too. Some of his entries were not merely concise but incomprehensible. Others, conversely, were written with a bagginess unbecoming a book on rhetoric. White recast them, put them in his own voice, and in so doing gave the sharp, uncompromising rules a surprisingly light and agreeable tone. He went at the text with a free hand—always careful, he said, to preserve "the spirit of Strunk."

In *E.B. White: A Biography*, Scott Elledge offers several examples of White's recastings. All are improvements. For instance, under Rule Twelve, "Use definite, specific, concrete language," Strunk had been inappropriately verbose: *Critics have pointed out how much of the effectiveness of the greatest writers, Homer, Dante, Shakespeare, results from their constant definiteness and concreteness.* In White's hands, the rule becomes concrete and the sentence snaps: *The greatest writers—Homer, Dante, Shakespeare—are effective*



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*largely because they deal in particulars and report the details that matter.*

White greatly expanded Strunk's chapter on "Words and Expressions Commonly Misused," dropped a chapter on spelling, and added a funny, inspiriting essay on style. And so Will Strunk's book became an E.B. White book—or better, it became Strunk-and-White, as it's known today, a blend of the professor and the practitioner, the prickly old pedagogue and his most talented student.

There was one other element to *The Elements* that White refused to tamper with—the sternness that White himself most admired about the original and its author. Much of *The Elements* is a *rule* book; it is prescriptive, a study in right and wrong. As White prepared his revision, the new *Webster's International Dictionary* hit the bookstores in a burst of publicity. It was the first great dictionary organized according to the "descriptivist" principle: the notion that, in the chaotic swirl of an ever-changing language, lexicographers "should have no traffic with artificial notions of correctness or superiority. [They] should be descriptive and not prescriptive." Descriptivists imported relativism into the study and teaching of English; and having seized the new *Webster's*, they threatened to carry every other guide to grammar and usage with them.

The editors at Macmillan got jittery. They farmed the manuscript out to several professional grammarians, who unanimously denounced the book's unyielding ethic—its insistence, for example, on such "lost causes" as the difference between *like* and *as*, or *will* and *shall*. White's editor passed along their objections, with hints that the revised *Elements of Style* should conform more closely to "modern educational theory." White's reply is worth quoting at length. Forty years on, it still has the power to invigorate a failing prescriptivist heart.

> I was saddened by your letter—the flagging spirit, the moistened finger in the wind, the examination of entrails, and the fear of little men. I don't know whether Macmillan is running scared or not, but I do know that this book is the work of a dead precisionist and a half-dead disciple of his, and that it has got to stay that way. I have been sympathetic all along with your qualms about "The Elements of Style," but I know that I cannot, and will-shall not, adjust the unadjustable Mr. Strunk to the modern liberal of the English Department, the anything-goes fellow. I am against him, temperamentally and because I have seen the work of *his* disciples, and I say the hell with him. . . . Either Macmillan takes Strunk and me in our bare skins, or I want out.
>
> To me no cause is lost, no level the right level, no smooth ride as valuable as a rough ride, no *like* interchangeable with *as*, and no ball game anything but chaotic if it lacks a mound, a box, bases, and foul lines. That's what Strunk was about, that's what I am about, and that (I hope) is what the book is about. Any attempt to tamper with this prickly design will get nobody nowhere fast.

Harper & Row. Opposite: Little Bookroom.

*Above: E.B. White and James Thurber in 1929. Opposite: White as a young man in New York.*

White won the argument, and the book was published in 1959 as he revised it, "in the spirit of Strunk." The trade edition quickly perched atop the bestseller list and stayed for several months. Its college edition sold half a million copies in the first three years. White made two subsequent revisions, in 1972 and in 1979; he left the design intact but added substantially to the section on "Words Commonly Misused," piling up expressions that had come to annoy him in the intervening years.

Every book on words and how to use them is, to one degree or another, a grab bag of its author's crotchets and punctilios, and this is doubly true for *The Elements of Style*, which assembles the prejudices of not one irascible language maven but two. White's disdain fell particularly hard on words he thought carried the odor of the pompous, the inexact, or the trendy. The 1959 edition damned the then-new coinage *personalize* ("a pretentious word, often carrying bad advice"). The 1972 edition did the same to *finalize* ("a peculiarly fuzzy and silly word. . . . One can't be sure what it means, and one gets the impression



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*William Strunk Jr. preparing a lecture.*

that the person using it doesn't know, either, and doesn't want to know"). By the 1979 edition, things had gotten so out of hand—with the invention of *prioritize*, *customize*, and the rest—that White composed a brief essay excommunicating all freshly made verbs ending in *ize*: "Never tack *ize* onto a noun to create a verb. Usually you will discover that a useful verb already exists. Why use *moisturize* when there is the simple, unpretentious word *moisten*?"

White was a master of what the professors call the American plain style, consisting mainly of straight-flowing sentences unimpeded by secondary clauses, with the subject, verb, and object bound closely together. It is hard to dissemble in the plain style, hard to show off. White's taste, if *taste* can describe something so essential to a man's character, is for the simple and unaffected; and it is stamped on every page of *The Elements*. About the overworked word *insightful*, he wrote: "Usually, it crops up merely to inflate the commonplace." The objection is telling.

Unlike many precisionists, he was not against neologisms as a matter of principle—in the little book there are passages about the "organic" and "dynamic" nature of language that would please any descriptivist. But if the language is constantly renewing itself, as the descriptivists say, White wanted it to do so in the direction of clarity and precision, away from airiness and abstraction: Let new words illuminate meaning, not obscure it. He was against neologisms only of a certain kind. Consider *finalize*—what moves a man to coin the word, in place of "conclude" or "settle" or "complete"? Does it convey some subtlety of meaning these more commonplace synonyms do not? Unlikely. Instead, the fellow who *finalizes* is merely reaching for the word nearest at hand regardless of its sense, in which case he is lazy, or, alternatively, he is trying to sound official and authoritative, in which case he is just strutting. In neither case is he worthy of emulation.

In the same way, White counseled against such gassy nouns as "feature," "factor," and "dimension." They are tools of obfuscation rather than expression; a sentence that relies heavily upon them may sound impressive at first hearing but is liable not to mean much of anything, which becomes apparent when you try to recast it into concrete words. White objected to the use of *hopefully* (standard meaning: "with hope") for "it is to be hoped," and *presently* (standard meaning: "soon") for "currently." A descriptivist will defend the new usages in the name of enriching our dynamic language. In fact, though, they diminish it. When, through constant misuse, *fortuitous* becomes synonymous with *fortunate*, *imply* with *infer*, *comprise* with *constitute*, the language shrinks and distinctions become harder to draw.

Many of these cavils are windmill-tilting, of course. *Finalize* is probably here to stay, along with the new senses of *hopefully* and *presently*. Writerly crotchets, even those as sound as White's, are often doomed, as he understood. But one of the intentions of *Elements* is to enliven the writer, to make him alert and self-conscious as he expresses himself, to induce him to assemble his own grab bag of phrases and words that he can't abide for their pretentiousness, their cloudy meaning, or their confused purpose. And since White's last revision in 1979, the list of such words has only grown. He would be disinclined to *reach out* to *communicators* whose *writing skills* lead them to tag every group a *community*, even when it is *faith-based* or *meaningful*. The state of the language today would plunge him into the grieving process.

Which only heightens the anticipation for the new revision of *The Elements of Style*. Over the last twenty years the book has grown whiskers—and not merely in its hidebound prejudices or its hardy prescriptivism. Students who bought the book last year, still in its 1979 incarnation, would have found Strunk and White railing against the old advertising slogan "Winston tastes good like a cigarette should," which no one under the age of thirty has ever heard of. They would learn to leave plenty of space on the first page of a manuscript, so the editor will have room to make notations for the "compositor." (Mommy, what's a compositor?) And when they needed to revise a draft by transposing paragraphs, *Elements* advised them to cut the manuscript with scissors and phys-



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ically rearrange the order of the material. The world of Strunk and White is a world of typewriters and pencils, not word processors.

Notwithstanding these antiquarian references, sales remained brisk. In 1994, the mergers and recombinations roiling the publishing industry kicked ownership of the book to Allyn and Bacon, a firm specializing in textbooks. "Here we had this wonderful title," the company's president, Bill Barke, told me the other day, "but it didn't have A & B's editorial imprint, if you see what I mean. There was a lot of datedness. I thought maybe we could provide our editorial input to updating it, combine it with our marketing clout, and really improve the performance of this product."

Written by a pair of mossbacks, *The Elements* is a book beloved by mossbacks, and Barke was alert to the dangers of tampering with the text. "With a classic like this," he said, "the real problem you get is that people think every word is kind of sacred." He fished around among White's surviving friends and colleagues for a new reviser—John Updike was approached, and so was White's stepson, the great *New Yorker* writer Roger Angell—but they demurred. ("We could never finalize anything," Barke said of the negotiations.)

In the end, the task of revising the little book was given over to a team of freelance copy editors, working with Allyn and Bacon's own in-house editors. This is the bad news. (I'll get to the good news in a moment.) Freelance copy editors are the curse of the publishing business. With publishers lopping off staff by the fistful, freelancers have acquired terrific power. As many writers have discovered, they tend to be of a type: working alone, overschooled and undereducated, usually armed with degrees from the further reaches of the liberal arts curriculum—sociology, for example, or women's studies. As a rule they are exquisitely sensitive to the marginal and the beside-the-point; they can spot an instance of gender or ethnic insensitivity at a hundred paces, even as typos, grammatical errors, factual misstatements, and egregious misspellings glide by them unnoticed.

They have made their mark on the fourth edition of *The Elements of Style*. In setting examples of correct and incorrect usage side by side, the format of the book has always been to put a poorly constructed sentence on the left and a corrected version on the right. And so it is in the new edition, with the exception of Rule Twenty ("Keep related words together"), where the correct and incorrect examples have been mistakenly, and rather obviously, transposed.

The error will doubtless cause some puzzlement in American classrooms; then again, maybe not. In any case it's hard to see how this little glitch could


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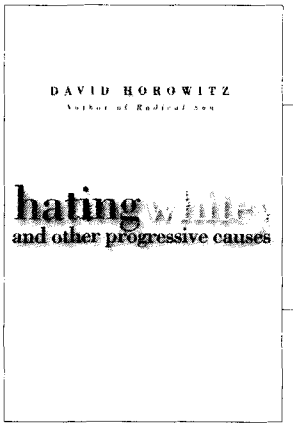


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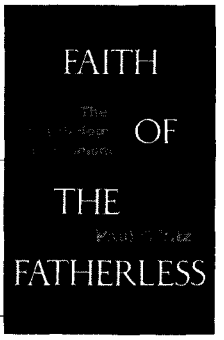


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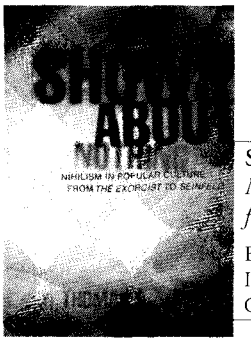

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have escaped the notice of professionals, until you look elsewhere under Rule Twenty and find the revision that must have truly concerned them. In the earlier editions, one of the good examples reads: "In the fifth book of *The Excursion*, Wordsworth gives a minute description of this church." The revisers have dumped this, replacing it with an example of their own. In the fourth edition we now read: "In *Beloved*, Toni Morrison writes about characters who have escaped from slavery but are haunted by its heritage."

"If people still read Wordsworth," Barke told me, "we would have left him in. But they don't. So we took him out."

He's got a point (Mommy, what's a Wordsworth?), and the same reasoning probably forced the substitution of Sylvia Plath for Keats and of Sappho for Pliny the Younger in other examples. Even so, mossbacks sniffing through the new text in hopes of finding further evidence of political correctness will be largely disappointed. The new edition shows signs of only one overarching principle of revision, which is this: Almost every use of the male pronoun to encompass both men and women has been meticulously excised. Strunk and White, in their fourth edition, have been unmanned.

Sometimes the pronoun simply vanishes, leaving the original sentence otherwise intact. Where once we read "A writer may err by making his sentences too compact and periodic," we now read: "A writer may err by making sentences too compact and periodic."

On other occasions the sentence is purified through the use of participles. Where once we read "The unskilled writer often violates this principle, from a mistaken belief that he should constantly vary the form of his expression," now we read: "The unskilled writer often violates this principle, mistakenly believing in the value of constantly varying the form of expression." Sentence by sentence, line by line, "the writer" assumes a ghostly form.

The revisions aren't as good as the originals, of course; there's a loss of vigor and cadence in the loss of specificity. My own guess, though, is that most members of the mossback community will not find the changes particularly troublesome. The use of *he* for *he and she* will presently (by which I mean soon) be a lost cause. And if nothing else, this neutered edition will forestall many pointless, not to say insane, classroom arguments launched by feminist undergraduates who would have been appalled at the masculine tone of earlier editions (and who would later become freelance copy editors to get even).

But White, who as we've seen didn't allow for lost causes, would probably have objected to the change. One of the last pieces he submitted to the *New Yorker*, where he had worked for fifty years, was a lampoon of the same unisex principle that has now altered his book. This was in the mid-1970s, and the piece was rejected. "To me," he wrote an editor at the magazine, "any woman's (or man's) attempt to remove the gender from the language is both funny and futile." Funny, maybe, but not at all futile.

*There is a single consideration underlying all White's reminders in* The Elements of Style: *concern for the reader.*

For the 1979 edition of *The Elements of Style*, he wrote a little sermon on the subject:

> The use of *he* as a pronoun for nouns embracing both genders is a simple, practical convention rooted in the beginnings of the English language. *He* has lost all suggestion of maleness in these circumstances. . . . It has no pejorative connotation; it is never incorrect. Substituting *he or she* in its place is the logical thing to do if it works. But it often doesn't work, if only because repetition makes it sound boring or silly. . . . Alternatively, put all the controversial nouns in the plural and avoid the choice of sex altogether, and you may find your prose sounding general and diffuse as a result.

And that, of course, is precisely what the new editors have often done—put the nouns in plural form, to de-sex them. And sure enough, the prose sounds general and diffuse as a result. What is truly remarkable, however, is that almost all of White's anti-neutering sermon, as quoted above, stands unaltered in the new edition. The new editors have inserted a single sentence in the middle of it, as a hedge: "Currently, however, many writers find the use of the generic *he* or *his* to rename indefinite antecedents limiting or offensive." Otherwise the passage is as White wrote it. His sentiment is still there, but now he sounds confused.

The same holds true throughout the new edition. The hoary disapprobations survive, no matter how out-of-step with the times: Don't begin a sentence with *however*; abjure *finalize*, *personalize*, and *prioritize*; use the serial comma; avoid *offputting* and *ongoing*; don't use *people* as a plural for *person*, *nauseous* as a synonym for *nauseated*, or *like* for *as*. Every one of the lost causes is still there. The compositor is still there! All that has really changed—aside from the defenestration of poor Wordsworth, Keats, and Pliny—is the de-sexing of the pronouns. This is odd, to say the least, in a text that is otherwise so thoroughly reactionary. But it is a tribute to the monomania of contemporary editors that the discordance is allowed to stand. As we say these days: Whatever. Just as long as you get the pronouns right.

So this is the good news: The little book endures, its strength only slightly diminished. Most important, White's last chapter has been left largely untouched; for it is here, in the essay called "An Approach to Style," that you come upon the book's beating heart, the source of much of its power. Here, at the end, is where you glimpse



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what Strunk and White have been up to all along.

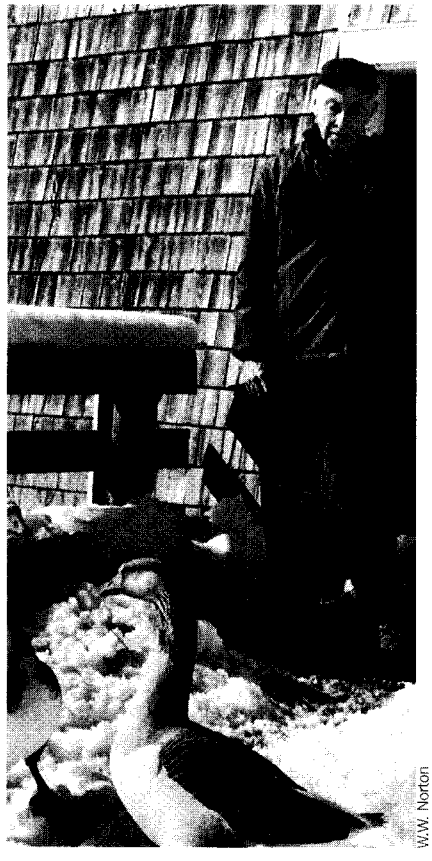
The essay appends to the body of the book twenty-one additional rules—though here, in contrast to the earlier sections, they are gently called "reminders." "The preceding chapters," White writes, "contain instructions drawn from established English usage; this one contains advice drawn from a writer's experience of writing." The tone is more relaxed, less formal, not at all censorious. The persnickety pedagogue has slipped offstage, and the reader finds himself in the pleasing company of the man who wrote *Charlotte's Web*.

E.B. White was not notably a man of ideas. In politics, in fact, he was a bit of a booby. On those few occasions when he aspired to the pundit's role, as the *New Yorker*'s editorial writer, it was to advance the woolly idea of "world government" after World War II. Wilfred Sheed once wrote that White embodied the spirit of the early *New Yorker*: "the spiritual home of the graceful writer with nothing to say." (Of course, Sheed was writing of the period, blessed in memory, when *New Yorker* writers did have nothing to say.) "White," he continued, "must be the archetype and all-time champion [of such writers]."

This isn't entirely fair; if nothing else White was a writer who knew enough to stay away from words like *archetype*. He had things to say, but they were small things, seemingly. "He was quite wonderful," wrote Joseph Epstein, in an otherwise dismissive essay on White, "at describing buildings at dusk, snow in the bright sun, a lake in the rain." Small things, perhaps; but the smallness is deceptive. His work is cherished today (by those who cherish it) because what he offered in his writing was himself, sui generis, E.B. White and no other—a man genial, tolerant, humorous, without artifice or pretense, and always with a half-moon of melancholy rising up against the backdrop. To fashion a style that allowed this self to show through so consistently and so indelibly, and over so long a span of years, must have been a difficult labor, an achievement attained at great cost: no small thing.

"An Approach to Style" is, oddly enough, an extended brief against style, as style is generally understood. "Young writers," he wrote,

> often suppose that style is a garnish for the meat of prose, a sauce by which a dull dish is made palatable.



W.W. Norton

> Style has no such separate entity; it is nondetachable, unfilterable. The beginner should approach style warily . . . by turning resolutely away from all devices that are popularly believed to indicate style—all mannerisms, tricks, adornments. The approach to style is by way of plainness, simplicity, orderliness, sincerity.

Each of White's twenty-one reminders nudges aspiring writers in this healthy direction, with advice they almost certainly don't want to hear. "Place yourself in the background." "Write with nouns and verbs." "Do not overwrite." "Do not affect a breezy manner." "Use orthodox spelling." And finally, and most painfully for the young person aflame with the desire for self-expression: "Prefer the standard to the offbeat."

There is a single consideration underlying all these reminders: concern for the other, for the reader. "Most readers," White says, "are in trouble about half the time." To neglect this fundamental fact—to indulge in obscurity for obscurity's sake, to choose words carelessly, to ignore the rules of usage—is a kind of moral transgression. Concern for the reader is what moves White to counsel clarity, simplicity, the avoidance of pomp and pretense.

Two things strike you as you dwell on White's reminders. First, he has touched on the very tendencies that lead a writer astray when he is bursting to express himself. And second, these are temptations that are not limited to the act of writing.

He closes the book with this advice:

> Do not forget that what may seem like pioneering may be merely evasion, or laziness—the disinclination to submit to discipline. . . . In choosing between the formal and the informal, the regular and the offbeat, the general and the special, the orthodox and the heretical, the beginner [should] err on the side of conservatism, on the side of established usage. No idiom is taboo; no accent forbidden; there is simply a better chance of doing well if the writer holds a steady course, enters the stream of English quietly, and does not thrash about.

*The Elements of Style* is undeniably a great book—whether it ranks among the century's twenty-one best is open to debate—and like many great books it pretends to be about one thing when in truth it is about another. It masquerades as a guide to usage but it is really a book about life—about the value of custom, the necessity of rules, the corruptions of vanity, the primacy of good taste, and the transcendent importance of always taking your fellows into account. This is what the book was about in the first edition, and it's what it is about in the fourth; and it will be so—hopefully!—in the fifth and sixth and seventh editions, for as long as the little book survives. ♦



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# Unlucky Stiffs

*Susan Faludi claims that our male-chauvinist culture oppresses even males.* BY CHRISTINA HOFF SOMMERS

Over the years, there have been an enormous number of popular books to explain how our "male culture" oppresses American women and children. Indeed, Susan Faludi wrote one of the most popular in the early 1990s, entitled *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women.*

Well, Faludi is back, and here in 1999, she's confident that the American public is ready for the final irony. It's not just women and children who are victims of the male culture. That culture is so oppressive, it makes even *men* its victims, too.

**Stiffed**
*The Betrayal of the American Man*
by Susan Faludi
William Morrow, 416 pp., $26

In *Stiffed: The Betrayal of the American Man*, Faludi unmasks a "masculinity crisis" so severe and pervasive she finds it hard to understand why men do not rise up in rebellion. *Stiffed* shows us the hapless men of the baby-boom generation, equipped by their fathers "with dangerous prescriptions of manhood," trying vainly to cope with a world in which they are doomed to fail. Men have been taught that "to be a man means to be at the controls and at all times to feel yourself in control." They cannot live up to this ideal of manliness and so, en masse, they lose their sense of self. Men, says Faludi, are "in agony."

In proof of her large claim, Faludi presents masses of evidence. *Stiffed* devotes hundreds of pages to stories and interviews with dozens of men: wife batterers in California, a group of teenage sex predators known as the Spur Posse, porn-video actors, men out of work because of corporate downsizing, depressed football fans, and Vietnam veterans who witnessed the My Lai atrocity. Most of Faludi's subjects have sad stories to tell about inadequate fathers, personal alienation, and feelings of helplessness.

Unfortunately, the reader never learns why the disconsolate figures Faludi has selected for attention are representative of American men. Her argument for the "male crisis" rests on the premise that what is happening at the extremes tells you a lot about the center. She met a fisherman who explained to her how this works: "If you want to see what's happening in a stream called our society, go to the edges and look at what's happening there, and then you begin to have an understanding . . . of what's going on in the middle."

Of course, to convince us that the edges of the stream tell us what's going on in the middle, Faludi needs more than the assurance of an unnamed fisherman. As it happens, social science operates on the opposite premise: Anecdotes (especially from the edges) are regarded as misleading unless backed up by some conventional studies using data with proper controls. The six years Faludi declares that she spent "researching" seem not to have included going to libraries to look at the formal surveys of how men are faring in American society.

In fact, those surveys routinely report high percentages of relatively contented people. In 1995, while Faludi was busy interviewing men for her book, *Psychological Science* published a review article entitled "Who is Happy?" which reported that 90 percent of North American men and women described themselves as happy with their lives. Faludi sees the modern workplace as humiliating and alienating for men. But a 1998 CNN/Gallup Poll found that 88 percent of men describe themselves as satisfied with their jobs (for women the figure is 84 percent).

Faludi's conversations convinced her that corporations have contributed in a major way to the demoralization of American men: "Productivity was something corporations and their shareholders now measured," she declares, "not by employee elbow grease, but by how many employees the company had laid off." She did begin writing her book during a recession, but you might think that America's remarkable recovery in recent years would force her to moderate her claim. It didn't. The economy may have recovered, she declares, but the men have not: "Something had been broken inside them, and it wasn't going to be made right by a boom based on inflated stock-market prices and temporary personnel." As Faludi sees it, America is paying for its economic prowess by forcing men into an inhuman game of competing and winning: "The American Century elevated winning to the very apex of manhood while at the same time disconnecting it from meaningful social purpose."

It's hard to take this complaint seriously. American preeminence in science and high technology is a major reason that the twentieth century will go down in history as the American Century. Are the thousands of American men forging revolutions in biology, neuroscience, medicine, and information technology "disconnected from meaningful social purpose"? She should have talked to some of them.

Faludi also claims that men are demeaned in the way women used to be. Academic feminists often argue that the culture dehumanizes women by treating them as ornamental objects. Faludi says that contemporary culture is now doing this to men, treating them as objects and "images" rather than as

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persons. Men, she says, now suffer because of an "enslavement to glamour." Like women, she says, men are now being undermined by the media's presentation of our "ornamental culture," being forced to compare themselves to "ghostly two-dimensional armies" of "superathletes," "action heroes," and television "stand-up comedians," who present men with unreal images of manhood. "Navigating the ornamental realm, much less trying to derive a sense of manhood from it, has become a nightmare all the more horrible for being virtually unacknowledged as a problem."

The fact that men greatly enjoy the feats of the superathletes or the jokes of the stand-up comics, the fact that they are quite unaware they are experiencing something horrible, makes no impression on Faludi. It never occurs to her that the horror she postulates is a figment of her theory. On the contrary, male obliviousness *only adds to the horror*: the "nightmare," she explains, is "all the more horrible for being virtually unacknowledged as a problem."

Faludi is preeminent among the group of crisis-writers who argue that America is an insidious culture that "destroys," "poisons," or "demoralizes" whole segments of the population. Her 1991 *Backlash* was followed by Mary Pipher's *Reviving Ophelia: Saving the Selves of Adolescent Girls*, in which we learned that the "selves" of the nation's *girls* are "crashing," "burning," and "disappearing." Not to be outdone, psychologist William Pollack soon followed with *Real Boys: Rescuing Our Sons from the Myths of Boyhood*, claiming that *boys* too are in crisis. He calls American boys "young Hamlets [who] succumb to an inner state of Denmark." Like Faludi, Pollack believes that males are traumatized by their efforts to conform to "myths" of masculinity imposed by the culture.

If the nation's children are in the kind of distress that Pipher and Pollack are reporting, they too seem not to be aware of it, nor has a national crisis of girls or of boys been noticed by conventional psychiatry. Of course, a small percentage of children are disturbed. But the average child is not mentally fragile and is not served well by being portrayed as such. Pipher and Pollack make their cases for crisis by avoiding or dismissing the findings of standard research. Their arguments are full of metaphors, and the data they adduce are mainly anecdotal.

Faludi follows the same formula. She presents multitudes of unhappy and frustrated men and tells us they have

*Susan Faludi*

William Morrow

been "betrayed": "It is as if a generation of men had lined up at Cape Kennedy to witness the countdown to liftoff, only to watch their rocket—containing all their hopes and dreams—burn up on the launch pad."

But though Faludi projects a commiserating sympathy for the plight of men, her lament over what is allegedly happening to them is actually based upon a sharp disapproval of their conventional masculinity. Orthodox feminist doctrine holds that masculinity is a "social construction" originally designed to keep women in a subordinate place. Faludi's book is in truth merely an elaboration of this theme, adapting it to show that the male culture, by imposing self-defeating ideals of manhood, has now unnerved men as well: "The architects of the American Century had drummed it in that manhood was all about the score—on Little League fields, in pro football stadiums, on television's Old West Frontier, in the space race."

And what exactly should we do to reform the society supposedly causing all this harm? This is the second problem that comes from dealing only with fringe anecdotes instead of mainstream data: Anyone who takes the analysis seriously will still be at a loss for what to do next. Faludi believes, for example, that America is too competitive. Does she then want radical changes in our economic system? Is she for eliminating competitive sports? Is she against standardized tests? Readers will quickly discern that Faludi wants changes, but what specifically those changes might be we never learn.

Instead, we get safely vague references to the better future that might emerge. Masculinity, as "the culture" now constructs it, is as harmful to men as it is to women. Men have an "unmapped journey ahead," leading to "new ways of being men." At present, men are too preoccupied with being men. But as they "struggle to free themselves from their crisis, their task is not, in the end, to figure out how to be masculine—rather their masculinity lies in figuring out how to be human."

Faludi claims that the poor, victimized men of America today have much to learn from the female veterans of the women's movement who have been successfully combating the culture for years. Of course, to learn how to fight the culture, men first have to *want* to fight the culture. But against what are they supposed to rebel? Against whom?

There really is no answer to such questions. All the author of *Stiffed* can do is repeatedly chide men for not going ahead and rebelling anyway—for not, in other words, believing what Susan Faludi believes: that, against all evidence, American males are in crisis, American culture is profoundly oppressive, and that anecdotes from the edge ought to make us want to change the course of the entire stream. ♦



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Edmund Morris has inserted a fictional character, "Edmund Morris," into his new biography of Ronald Reagan.—*News item*

*Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan* / 432

# Chapter 8

By the fall of 1943, Reagan was running with a faster Hollywood crowd. Often he would meet up with Humphrey Bogart and Errol Flynn, and they would go off on all-night sprees, carousing from one hot spot to the next. The night of November 13, however, was different. Bogart was drinking alone at the bar of the Brown Derby. He'd just learned that his new love, Lauren Bacall, had dumped him for a tall, mysterious writer from the Midwest, a fellow with strong penetrating eyes and manly gestures, yet who was not without a soft, sensual side.

"Slim left me for Edmund Morris," Bogart blurted out to Reagan when they met at the bar.

"Gee, that's tough, Bogie. Morris is doing it to all the dames. Let's face it, he's the biggest stud in town." Two weeks earlier, Reagan had been pursuing Betty Grable at one of Jack Warner's parties, when she spotted Morris across the room sitting quietly taking notes. Grable dropped the B-actor and threw herself at the fiercely intelligent biographer. Like many women, Grable was aroused by the sight of a character who was the product of a post-modern sensibility.

As Bogie was drowning his sorrows that night at the Brown Derby, Morris himself happened to enter the room with Clare Boothe Luce on his arm. All eyes turned, and a hush fell over the restaurant, as Morris's aura of animal-like grace and power permeated the establishment. Morris led his date to a secluded corner, just next to a table where Carl Sandburg was deep in conversation with Abraham Lincoln. Morris had been busy all day filming *Casablanca*. Though the film had been released the previous year, Morris had insisted on going back and inserting himself into the famous airport scene. Morris's famous "Do you mind if I intrude ..." appearance in the middle of the "hill of beans" speech has gone down in movie history. The scene of course took some time for Morris to get right, so the picture was not rereleased until the fall of 1957.

Morris was nuzzling with Luce over champagne, talking about his theory that Boswell was a greater man than Johnson, when a drunk Lyndon Johnson stumbled across the table, looking for his biographer, Robert Caro. "Where is that sumbitch?" Johnson drawled. But Morris, the master of any situation, leveled him with a left cross, restoring peace to the nightclub.

"If I were a woman, I think I might be in love with Edmund Morris," Claude Rains was heard to comment.



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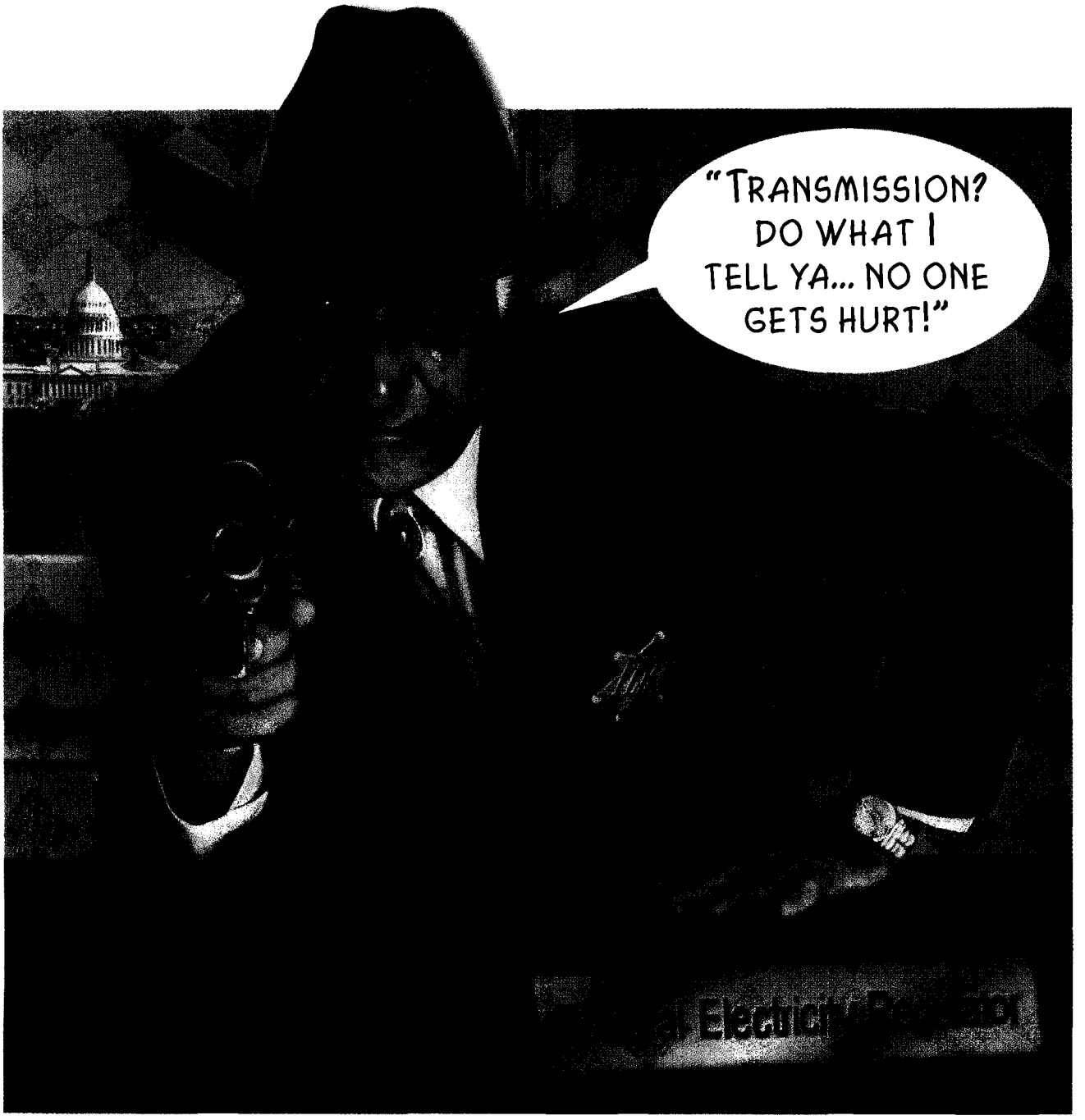
*TRANSMISSION — WHO'LL RUN THE SYSTEM?*

# MEET THE REGULATOR




Congress is on the verge of handing vast and unfettered new policing authority over America's vital electricity TRANSMISSION SYSTEM to a little-known and often unaccountable federal regulatory agency—the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC). The bloating of this agency into the warden of the nation's electricity grid should be alarming to all.

FERC's new precinct will be composed of regional transmission organizations (RTOs), entities that will control transmission and even the distribution of electricity. FERC will decide how many RTOs to create... what these RTOs look like... who is in them... how they will be governed... what they will do and when they will do it. Utilities of all types and sizes will be marshaled into strange transmission lock-ups by regulatory fiat... with little chance for appeal. More importantly, the States will be pushed to the sidelines!

Congress should instead consider measures which encourage the voluntary formation of RTOs and seek a market-based solution... not more heavy-handed federal intervention. Unleashing a torrent of federal regulation in the name of "deregulation" dishonors the goals of consumer choice and market competition.

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